

DIDSBURY SERMONS.

DIDSBURY SERMONS.

FIFTEEN DISCOURSES

PREACHED

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DIDSBURY, NEAR MANCHESTER.

BY

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TUTOR

IN HEBREW AND CLASSICS.

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MAN THE GLORY OF GOD.

“O LORD our lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth ! who has set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained ; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him ? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him ? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands ; thou hast put all things under his feet : all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field ; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord our lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth !”—PSALM viii.

1. THESE are not merely human words and thoughts. Man has no such thoughts, utters no such words. Jehovah, the unoriginated, independent, all-adorable Being, man's lord ! Earth, the dwelling-place of man, the paramount sphere for the assertion, vindication, and perfect illustration of the Divine attributes ! Man himself, the outbeam of the glory of God, the elect depository, vehicle, and instrument of that glory ! When did man ever speak or think thus ?

2. This is God's Spirit in man, teaching him, not without parable, the meaning of the world and of human nature ; waking him up to the fact, that heaven and earth are invisibly knit together, and must by and by be one ; and calling forth in him the admiration, awe, praise, thanksgiving, faith, desire, which so marvellous an oracle is fitted to create. This is man's spirit lifted from the dust by God's Spirit and having its eyes open, standing

out in the congregation of the saints, and declaring in language, which, for the speaker himself, has its enigmas, the things of the kingdom of God, which were, and are, and shall be.

3. Thou great I Am—so we interpret the Psalmist—the same yesterday, and today, and for ever, we of the earth, flesh and blood of the race of Adam, we are thine, and Thou ours! We call Thee our lord, for Thou callest us thy offspring. Thou hast propriety in us: Thou art our maker, and the stays and issues of our being are in Thee. We also have propriety in Thee: for we carry thy image and superscription; and by thy ordinance express the majesty, might, and supreme dominion, which constitute “thy name.”

4. That name, that wondrous, matchless name: how dost Thou set it in the heavens! How far-stretching and glorious a ministry do the works of thy hands there execute as thy representatives—the silent preachers of thy eternal Godhead! How do they tell aloud with their voiceless voices the splendour and greatness of Him, who dwells within the spangled curtains of their tabernacle, and whose throne is ramparted about by their impregnable and jewelled walls!

5. Yet not in the heavens alone, high and radiant as they are, dost Thou manifest Thyself, and make known to the creatures the sublime mystery of thy nature, perfections, and government. The holy, reverend name, which they so laud and celebrate, is excellent here in all the earth. If glorious above, it is no less really, though it may be less conspicuously, glorious beneath. East, west, north, south, wherever man is found through all the amplitude of the world which Thou has built for him, thy name is extolled and magnified.

6. Nay—wonder though it be—the glory of thy name, as man displays it, is a higher, fuller, and more abiding glory than that of the vastest, noblest works of the visible creation. We look up to heaven, cloud and mist in our eyes, and we exclaim, How great is the glory of God! We droop our gaze, and look around us, the cloud and the mist vanished, and lo! the former glory hath no glory, by reason of a glory that excelleth; and in joyful surprise and bewilderment we cry out, “O Lord, our lord”—not lord of the universe so much as ours—“how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”

7. To appearance it is not so. For what is man? He is a child, the latest born of the intelligent household of God. That household has its patriarchs possibly, æons on æons old, the beginning of all being not uncreate. Its ancients too, who shall number them? spirits venerable for service in the unseen sanctuary, and for accumulated knowledge and experience of the ways of God. It has its manly youth, God’s chariots marshalled as in the holy place of Sinai, ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, who do his commandment, hearkening to the voice of his word. Here, we stand by the cradle of creation, and the infant of the universe lies in it!

8. Man—he is the weakest and feeblest of the creatures endowed by God with rational soul. What are his strength, or wisdom, or resources of any kind, viewed side by side with those of angels, good or evil? Compared with his youngest elders of God’s great family, how circumscribed are his faculties, how narrow the sphere of his observation, how poor and slender his spiritual growth and development! To say the most, he is a creature in the very first stage of his immortal being; receiving his first lessons,

and taking his first steps in the discipline, that shall open his way to the prerogatives of everlasting life. Above all, with the angelic church and hierarchy before us, what a gulf is fixed between them and man by sin, and by all that sin has brought in its train !

9. And yet, child of the ages as man is, he is the glory of God. In him there is a miniature copy of the attributes and government of God. The name of God is signally, and over the widest possible area of creature existence, expressed, declared, and made excellent in man. God is pleased to assign to him the loftiest position which a being can hold under the Divine administration, and to ordain for him offices and functions altogether unique, and of unparalleled dignity and consequence.

10. It is a great deep, we cannot fathom it ; but so it was, that in the course of the government of God there came to be disturbance, disorder, secession, apostasy, rebellion, war. Evil in some inexplicable way found place among the creatures, and so wrought, that the Infinitely Blessed God became to many of them an object of distrust, and not of distrust only, but of malignant and active hostility. The prerogatives of God were disputed ; the perfections of God were contravened and denied ; the empire of God was assailed, impaired, dismembered ; the sacred and all-glorious name of God was, for a season, thrust down into shadow and dishonour.

11. At an epoch quite unknown to us, through causes and in circumstances also unknown, angels, multitudes of them, fell under condemnation for sin, and were driven out of heaven ; their business thenceforward being to thwart the counsels of God, to employ the powers of which He was the author as arms of offence against Him, and so far as might be to avenge upon God, and upon

other creatures, who either were or might become holy, the smart and ruin of their own dreadful downfall.

12. What the constitution and administration of this gigantic apostasy are ; what the range and methods of its warfare against God ; and to what precise objects, at any given period of its history, it has directed its endeavours, we are greatly ignorant. One thing we know, it existed before the world was, and it still exists—the kingdom of darkness, the spacious realm and all but irresistible authority of the Devil and his angels. And we know further that, by the craft of the leader of this great revolt from God, man at the very outset of his course was led to join in the revolt, and so became at once the victim and the tool of the Wicked One ; falling short of the glory of God, sinking down into spiritual ignorance and corruption, losing his hold on immortality, and taking, as the subordinate of his betrayer and murderer, the ignominious, awful position of an enemy to God by sin and wicked works.

13. But with respect to man and his relations to the power of evil, thank God, this is not the whole of the case. The very being thus poisoned in the cradle by the soul-killer, and by Satanic cunning and witchery transmuted into a sinner, despite this downfall, in some sort because of it—because, that is to say, of the dignity of the nature marred, and because of the circumstances under which its ruin was effected—is appointed by God to be the occasion, means, and agent of the restitution of all things. In man, the infant of creation, God has laid for Himself a new foundation of his everlasting strength. He is the basis and platform, on which God will re-establish, build up, and in sight of heaven and earth put the topstone upon his immutable and perfect praise.

Man shall be the instrument, which God shall employ for avenging his quarrel with the creatures, and for restoring the shaken balance of his moral government. Through man, as the medium of the Divine action, the challenged prerogatives of God shall secure universal recognition; the perfections of God shall be illustrated with a fulness and completeness, which shall stop the mouth of all gain-sayers; and the wronged and trampled name of God, recovered from the soil and shame of its long abasement, shall shine forth as the sun in undimmed and consummate glory. By the mouth of the babes and sucklings of the lapsed race of Adam, speaking aloud in their nature, circumstances, history, and wonderful doings, the majesty and sovereign rights of Him from whom they and all creatures come, God shall send forth his voice, and that a mighty voice; and the tumultuous outcry of the frantic hosts of the adversaries shall be stilled and hushed for ever.

14. Is it not a marvel of marvels? We consider thy heavens, O Lord, with the sun, the glory of them, dwelling royally in the tent which Thou didst pitch for him; all the work of thy fingers. The moon, too, and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; we consider them. And with these magnificent products of thy limitless wisdom and might in our presence, what is man, of whom such things are spoken? He is a mote, a pin-point, an atom, a nothing. How much less than nothing is he, when we look upon him not as Thou didst make and design him to continue, but as he actually is; guilty, disfranchised, debased, apostate, a worker of iniquity! Strange that Thou shouldst take account of such a creature: that Thou shouldst even remember that he is! Strange beyond strangeness, that he should never for a moment pass out

of thy sight, that his well-being should be watched and provided for with the deepest solicitude of thy eternal love, and that Thou shouldest allot to him the foremost place among the instruments and agents of thy will !

15. Yet so it is. "Thou makest him a little lower"—only a little—"than the angels. Thou crownest him with glory and honour. Thou settest him over the works of thy hands." Man is as great as he is little. In one respect a babe, in another he is a giant with the strength of a unicorn ; and woe to the potsherds, human or super-human, that venture to strive with him ? Insignificant enough in the flesh—in his origin, capacities, and providential designation and destiny, he is mightier than the mighty. He was never an angel ; still less is he an angel now. But even now he is only less than angels. Whatever his condition, whatever his estimate of himself, this is how he is regarded in the celestial household of God. Heaven never calls him brute or demon. He is a brother-king of the angels, though, for the present, the gold of his crown is dulled, and the jewels, some of them, are dropped from it. Still he reigns. Does he not reign ? Yes. He is thy representative and vicegerent on earth. Earth and all that pertains to it, "all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas," are his empire. All things terrestrial are, by thy ordination, put beneath his feet ; and he is head over them all, even as Thou, Lord, art his head. Thy name is excellent in him in all the earth, just as in the sun, moon, stars, and other parts of thy unintelligent handiwork above the earth, thy name is excellent. Only far more here than there ; for this natural dominion of man over the inferior creatures is but the image and

symbol of a vastly superior and more extended jurisdiction, which, under thy sovereignty, he exercises over all things, whether things in earth or things in heaven, visible or invisible, temporary or everlasting. Man is great above all creature greatness; for in him God wins back and holds for ever that Divine mastery, against which many of the creatures, man himself among them, had rebelled, and of which man's present rule in the world as lord of all is simply a fraction and earnest.

16. But do we not exaggerate? "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet." Is this sober and literal fact? Even taking the terms in the nearest and most obvious application of them, is it true that *all things* are put under man? If man is at enmity with God, are not the lower creatures at enmity with man? Is not his authority disputed on the very ground, where, we might presume, he would find it easiest to maintain and exercise it? It is even thus: we may not deny it. Very many of the creatures are able to distance the reach of man. Of those within his reach, not a few are intractable and violent; some even destroy their king. And if this be the case, is it at all conceivable, that, in the sense just now indicated, and on that broader platform of things where thrones and dominions fight against God, all things, absolutely and without qualification, are placed under the sovereignty of man?

17. What will you call it? Call it paradox; call it contradiction, if you please. Such, notwithstanding, is the fact. All things, in the uttermost width of the expression, are put in subjection under man. Literally and without limitation God has put everything under him. Man's broken and imperfect royalty among beast, bird,

fish, are only a shadow and glimpse of a most real, perfect, and all-comprehending rule, which God purposes to secure to Himself, is now in course of securing, and will by and by completely gain and hold for ever in and through man.

18. But what is man, of whom the Holy Ghost thus speaks? Is the language of the text historical? Does it carry us back to that amazing display of the Divine glory of which earth was the theatre, when God breathed into dust, which his hands had moulded, the breath of life, and man became a living soul? And is it of the individual Adam, the first of human kind, the progenitor of us all, of Adam, as he was in his primeval sinlessness and dignity, that what is here affirmed is to be understood? Surely this cannot be maintained. For, though it is true that Adam in Eden was king of the earth as none of his descendants have been, and though there is a sense in which all that is declared in the Psalm respecting man would hold of our great natural parent, the Divine testimony here respecting man's greatness embraces most clearly the present and the future, as well as the total past of human history, and can therefore by no means be restricted to the individual Adam, and the historic perfection of Paradise. Besides, the very terms of the Psalm exclude this application. For, not to insist on the "babes and sucklings" of the second verse—language which is not compatible with a purely singular reference—it is man, as he is son of man, not the personal forefather of the race so much as his offspring, born after his image, and sharer of his nature, of whom the inspired writer discourses.

19. Is it, then, of mankind in general, taken collectively or distributively, that the Psalmist's representation must be held to treat? As though it taught, that human

nature, as such, irrespective of all diversities of circumstance, state, or character, the unit or aggregate man, constituted the ground on which God would wage war with his enemies, and overcome them? And that, therefore, not only the entire race in mass, but, in some sort, every member of it, is and shall be for ever the strength and praise of God their Maker? Against this view, whatever element of truth may enter into it, there lies an irresistible moral objection. To suppose this would be not only to revolutionize all our moral instincts and convictions; it would be to fly in the face of the whole tenour of the Scripture revelation, and, in particular, to becloud and utterly perplex the holy character of God, as exhibited by that revelation. In presence of what we know of the Divine perfections, and of the eternal distinction of right and wrong, it would be incongruous, morally impossible, a conception not to be allowed a moment's footing in the mind, that man, as he is and has been ever since Eden dismissed him, wrecked, degraded, prostrate, to so great a degree earthly, and sensual, and devilish, should have all things put under him.

20. But conceive of man, if you are able, not created, but derived and descended man; man's son, therefore man; as personal and individual as Adam was, yet, like Adam, only in other respects, and in a far loftier sense, impersonally representing, containing, and embodying the entire human race; wholly free both from Adam's moral fault, and from all participation, such as that of the rest of our kind, in the moral consequences of his fault; man truly and properly, as God intended him to be, as he actually was in his original constitution and character, and as he still is apart from all that defiles, dishonours,

and ruins him; so man, as that not by any transcendental juggle of ideas, or mysterious shifting and shuffling of forensic relations, but by reason of a divinely-appointed and most real, efficient, and lasting vicariousness, he shall be the equivalent of every human being—in such manner the equivalent, that, before God, and in the reason and truth of things, every man is this man, and this man every man; man gathering up in himself, by his being, acts, and influence, all other men, and virtually and potentially restoring the whole human family to its pristine integrity and honour: supposing such man, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, by some marvellous working of God's perfections legally and economically holding the room of all those whose nature he inherited:—would it then strike us as incongruous, or at all impinge upon our sense of moral meetness and propriety, if this man, and so we, and so all who partake our nature, had all things, as the text declares to be the case, put under our feet? On the contrary, bewildering as the providential mystery might be, would not man, under so august a dispensation of Infinite wisdom and goodness, be felt to be most truly and sublimely man, and, in point of ethical fitness and right, would it not be recognised as a most just and becoming ordinance of God, that all things should be brought under the jurisdiction of man?

21. There is man, such as we have now attempted to picture. Virtually, before the foundation of the world, man, in this highest sense of the term, was. And though, even when the text was written, the virtual had not passed into the actual, this has now, for near twenty centuries, been matter of historic fact. In the end of the world, by the determinate counsel of God, the world

had a new beginning: from Adam's stock, made of a woman, there came forth man, the Son of Man, in the proper pureness and dignity of manhood: and in Him, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, the very substance and life of our nature and of all who bear it, one in his individuality, universal in his substitutionary comprehension of our being and interests, the man Christ Jesus, the Second Adam, it is true, without qualification or reserve, that all things are put in subjection under man. We do not as yet see all things, even in this lower and visible world, put under man, as we commonly know him by history, observation, and consciousness: man has never been so seen since the days of Paradise. But if we have eyes such as God plants in living souls, we see, made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, the true, representative, all-including Man, wearing the diadem which God from the first prepared for our nature, crowned with the glory and honour of universal dominion. (Hebrews ii. 8, 9.)

22. The method and process of this restored supremacy of man are plainly suggested by the passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews just quoted. That wonderful and adorable Being, who in the beginning existed as God in relation to God, the Everlasting Word and Only Begotten of the Father, the brightness of the glory of God and stamp of his substance, first-born of the creatures, because creator of them all, and so in nature higher than the highest of them, He by incarnation became, what before He had not been, lower somewhat than the angels; and, while Lord of all, took the form of a subject and was made in the likeness of men; to the end that, being found in fashion as a man, He might accomplish a task otherwise impracticable, and through

his own boundless grace and that of the Father who sent Him *tasting death for every man*, might thus bear the dreadful penalty and consequence of sin, might recover us to the favour and likeness of God, might cause our nature once more to shine forth in its real glory, might utterly and finally foil with his chosen weapon God's great antagonist and the author of our ruin, and might put all things absolutely and for ever under the sway of restored and reigning man. This is the doctrine ; one which, with the temper and tendencies of our times in view, it becomes us very specially to mark. Jesus, the Divine Son of God made man, by his death for us all, not by his incarnation merely, or his life on the earth, but distinctively and preeminently by his death, his death as the very object and reason of his becoming lower than angels,—this is what the passage affirms,—delivers man from the ruin of his sin, gives him victory over his destroyer, reinstates him in his lost sovereignty, and secures to God in him, despite all enemies and in triumph over all, enduring and perfect praise. How Christ's death has this value and efficacy, we learn from the entire spirit and genius of both Testaments, as well as from many particular Scriptures, which open and allege this great article of Christian faith.

23. In the first place, the death of the Divine Son of Man was a propitiation for the sins of the world, which restored the legal basis of our sonship to God. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to mankind their trespasses. He, the single just One, died for us, the countless unjust, that He might bring us to God. We had all sinned and were come short of the glory of God. The blood of Christ, atoning for sin, was the virtual justification and restitution of all ; putting man

as man, whether the individual or the race, once more in law on his original footing before God, and qualifying him to become God's chosen instrument for purging evil out of the creation, and for making all things new. As the Apostle puts it, Christ died, that through death he might render null and void the malediction entailed by the fall, and so, abolishing the great work of the Devil, might in reality abolish the Wicked One himself, placing him and his empire under the feet of man. In a word, the death of our Divinely-human representative, by reason of its infinite merit as a sin-offering, neutralizes the curse of the law, brings us back to the favour of God, and renders man capable of fulfilling his original function as the stiller, throughout the universe, of the enemy and avenger.

24. Again, Christ's death puts all things under man, inasmuch as it confers the moral strength, which enables him to assert and maintain his supremacy over evil. The same atonement, which delivers from forfeiture and disability, and which restores the lost prerogative and status of our sonship, provides for the bestowment of the power, by which the ancient authority of the sonship may be regained and effectually wielded. That lordship over all, which the Redeemer won for Himself when he spoiled the principalities and powers by his cross, triumphing over them in it, was connected directly and immediately with a series of events, in which the sacrifice for sin found its supplement and perfecting—his resurrection from the dead, his return to heaven, and his glorious session as the Mediator at the right hand of God. He "was raised again for our justification." He that "descended first into the lower parts of the earth . . . is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that

He might fill all things." "To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living." "This man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God ; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." And our lordship in Him, as to the power by which we become capable of exercising it, is the fruit and result of Christ's glorification with the Father. While the value of the death of Christ as an atonement is the centre and spring of our recovery, our actual uplifting and coronation are effected through that economy of grace under which the world was brought, when Christ ascended on high, and received from the Father gifts for men. These gifts are our renovation. We reign in Christ through them. What they are we know. They are many and they are one. Christ is glorified ; therefore the Holy Ghost is given. This is the gift of gifts. And in his rule and influence provision is made for the complete equipment of man for the office, to which the will of God has designated him. The earth is put into a state of readiness for fulfilling its vocation. Supernatural light and energy are infused into our moral darkness and helplessness. And in accordance with gracious, evangelical conditions, individual human souls are saved from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Moreover, under the hand of the Spirit, thus carrying into effect and applying the benefit of the cross, a various machinery is brought into operation, designed to counterwork and eventually destroy the usurpation of the Evil One on earth. A full and sufficient revelation of truth is furnished in inspired Scriptures. A spiritual corporation and brotherhood is established, the trustee of this truth,

whose business it is to spread the knowledge of it through the world. Finally, from among the members of this divine society, persons divinely chosen and equipped are charged with the responsibility of promulgating the truth which the living Church commits to them, and are endowed with supernatural strength, enabling them, instrumentally, to turn their fellows from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Thus the death of Christ, in its meritorious consequences, is, by way of Divine economy and provision, the putting of all things under the feet of man.

25. Once more, the death of Christ is the subjection of all things to man by reason of the actual, absolute, and everlasting authority with which, as the fruit and reward of his passion, Christ in his glorified human nature is invested on our behalf at the right hand of God. So St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost: "David is not ascended into the heavens; but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool." And again, in his first Epistle: "Jesus Christ . . . is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." To the same effect St. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, speaks of the working of that mighty power of God, "which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." So once more, in the grand passage in the second chapter of the Philippians: "Let this mind be

in you, which was also in Christ Jesus : who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name : that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Thus Christ’s death is not only the legal basis of man’s ascendancy, and the fountain of the virtue which enables him to exercise it ; in its consummation and complete result it becomes that ascendancy. Man, in the person of the triumphing, reigning Christ, sits on the throne, and all things are under him. All natural forces, all moral agents, all relations and tendencies, however multifarious and complex, all being in all its dimensions and qualities—“all things” are ruled by the Mediator-Man. He wields all, administers all, controls, directs, and orders all, so that principalities and powers in heaven see displayed in the Church, under new and more wondrous modes of action, those glorious attributes of God, which the great apostasy had scrupled and obscured. And not only so ; but in this Divine arrangement, the whole human race and the individual man are made more than conquerors through Him who gave Himself for them. As a race, we are no longer slaves of Satan ; we are God’s freemen : the snare of the fowler is broken, and we are escaped. Nor is there, in fact, a single human soul, of whom it may not be affirmed that, in Christ’s propitiation and in the power of his Holy

Ghost, he is independent of evil, and master of all the forces of the adversary. Relatively and provisionally, this is the position of all men; and for those to whom Christ is preached, and who live by faith in Him, it holds to the full—Satan is bruised under their feet, and they do all things demanded by their “calling of God” through Christ strengthening them.

26. It may be said, indeed, that though we thus see all things placed under the exalted Son of Man, and, in Him, under our kind and ourselves, we do not, as matter of sensible and present experience, see even Christ established as Lord of all. There is rule and authority adverse to the throne of God, which is not yet put down, but which still lifts itself higher than the stars of heaven. The Evil One is at large. Great part of the earth is in the shadow of death. The Church of Christ answers but imperfectly to its divine ideal. Individual saints know in part, rejoice in part, prophecy in part, triumph in part. And long generations of men, smitten by the stroke of mortality, the good not less than the bad, see corruption, and are trodden underfoot of the enemy and avenger. How can all these undeniable facts be made to consist with the absolute and active reign of the God-Man, and of us in Him? They do consist with this reign, and are involved in it.

27. If Christ's supremacy be not manifest, it is real. The children in the temple cried “Hosanna;” and in the ears of heaven their acclamation rang out the note of victory for Him whom they magnified, and in Him, was the sounding forth of God's perfect praise. And ever since, the babes and sucklings have had the preeminence. They have had it, when the heel of oppression has been stamped upon them. They have had it under cover of

their sheepskins and goatskins, in caves and dens of the earth. They have had it amidst trial of cruel mockings and of fiery deaths. And they have the preeminence still. The weak things of the world, as of old, confound the mighty, and things that are not bring to nought the things that are. Sin has no dominion over those who are in Christ: they subdue and rule it. The world is not their master: on the contrary, they sit as assessors with Christ in the judgment with which He judges the Prince of this world. Sorrow, tribulation, death—not even these prime forces of the foe and avenger are strong enough to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nor is it otherwise beyond the circle of personal experience and prerogative. Christ and his people and cause are the powers, which carry the sceptre and coronet of the earth. Truth is in the ascendant, not error. The gates of hell do not prevail against the Church. The wickedness and misery of mankind are under doom. Not a work of the devil, but the tooth of decay has eaten into it. Death himself has the paralysis of death upon him. The kingdoms of this world, rage they never so furiously, are not their old lord's; they are the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ. Could we but strip off the wrapping of enigma and mystery, which everywhere masks and disguises the reality of things, we should see the whole realm of human life and history possessed and interpenetrated by the all-regulating wisdom and all-governing might of Him, whom John in the Apocalypse saw wearing on his head the "many crowns."

28. Moreover, the supremacy of Christ, as it is real, is progressive likewise; and this, whether in the individual, the Church, or the world at large. The salvation of grace goes from strength to strength in the hearts of believers;

there is motion, advance, development, growth, perfecting. So in the Christian brotherhood ; whatever local or temporary fluctuations may mark its career, it increases and enlarges from age to age. It has long since thrown off its swaddling clothes. It has made its way—through numberless errors, follies, troubles, misdoings, sins, and providential chastisements, it must be confessed ; yet, made its way—to a mighty manhood. It is this day wiser, purer, stronger, and abundantly more widespread than at any former period. It is never at one stay. It goes from stage to stage, and prevails with God and men. And the same is true of the kingdom of Christ as a whole. The living subjects of it are full of the spirit of a sacred violence ; and they urge it forward in the face of every obstruction. The Gospel is advancing, not receding. Religious ignorance and error are losing ground, not making it : their sword is jagged, and their eye dim, and their natural strength abated. Human misery and iniquity wane ; they do not wax, or even hold their own. Each day yonder sun crosses the sky, he sees the shadows of evil rolling further and further backwards, and the great daylight coming nearer, of which his illumination is only the forerunner and natural type.

29. We go further than this. A time draws on, when Christ's supremacy shall be manifestly and indisputably predominant, when it shall not only be, as it is and has been, real and progressive, but when it shall reach a height, at which none shall be able to question its paramount presence and authority. To every faithful disciple of Christ there is such a future, when the knowledge, blessedness, sanctity, and hope of the present shall be vastly outdone ; when, not in the course of life only, but in the end of it, he shall assert his prerogative of victory

to the uttermost over evil ; and when, though in another sense than that in which it was true of the Master, through death he shall destroy the potentate of death, and secure glorious and exemplary triumph over all his dominion. It is permitted us, too, to look forward to a future of the Church, in comparison with which its existing condition shall be one of rudiment and infancy—a future, when its stakes shall be strengthened, its cords lengthened, and its converts multiplied ; when the truth shall shine forth in it with a more uniform and diffusive splendour ; when the two great factors of its life, the confidence of the faith and the profession of the faith, shall assume a new energy, and work with the vigour of a more firmly knit and an intenser combination ; and when, as the light of the world, it shall go forth from its chamber, and do the giant's task with the giant's will and might and success. And although we may doubt, whether a day will ever come, when literally every individual man shall be converted, we rest on sure ground in affirming, that, sooner or later, the Gospel shall be preached for a witness to all nations ; all nations shall call the Redeemer blessed ; and the saving knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters the sea.

30. Not here, however, do we reach the climax of the meaning of the Psalm. Reality, progress, and even predominance are not, strickly speaking, the full and final putting of all things under man. There must needs be more than we now speak of. There shall be more. The apostle Paul bids us press the declaration of the Psalmist to the uttermost. Excepting only Him “which did put all things under Him,” “there is nothing”—absolutely nothing—“that is not put under Him ;” and “He must reign till He hath put all enemies under his feet.” Now sup-

posing even the predominance of the rule of Christ to rise to the highest conceivable point, could this voice of the Spirit find its answer in experience and fact, while Death still brandished his dart in the face of living saints, and held quiet empire over untold millions of sleeping ones? Whatever other foes be overthrown and trampled, if Man does not triumph over Death, where is his victory? The Divine testimony is, that all enemies shall be destroyed—the chiefest of them not excluded. Death, longlived as no other, and, as no other, mighty—this “last enemy” shall in the end give up the ghost and perish. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ,” in God’s appointed time, “shall all be made alive.” “The hour cometh, when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth.” As a thief in the night by and by—we know not when—the Son of Man shall suddenly break in upon the ancient domain of death: and the bondsmen of the ages, from sea and land, shall wake into life; and the mortal and corruptible of universal human nature shall put on deathless incorruption. And so shall come to pass the saying which is written, “O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?” This is the victory—the death of Death. “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”

31. Thus, the last stronghold of the Wicked One stormed and levelled; the blood-bought possession of God all freed together from humiliation and peril; the moral refuse and rubbish of the universe swept away into its own place of dishonour and destruction—man, in his Divinely-human representative and federal head, shall ascend on high leading captivity captive; “the Son Himself”—whatever the inspired oracle may mean—

“shall be subject to Him that did put all things under Him ;” and perfect and eternal praise shall accrue to God as all in all.

32. Our wonder remains. It is rather heightened than abated. When we consider thy heavens, and the things that are therein,—Lord, what is man, that Thou shouldest thus declare of him that, in so sublime and transcendent a sense, Thou puttest all things in subjection under his feet? We marvel, and we adore. We do not doubt or question. The record cannot be misunderstood, nor is the force of it to be evaded or impugned. And it is enough. It may be, that the simple grammatical value of the Psalmist’s words does not rise to the height of the exposition now given of them. It may be that David himself did not even imagine his language to have so deep a significance as that which we have found it to possess. All this we admit. But this is nothing to the point. The question is, what the Holy Ghost, speaking by the mouth of an inspired man in the Old Testament, meant to say. And here, as in so many other cases, the same Holy Ghost, speaking in the New Testament, tells us what he meant. Is he not competent to do so? Shall we deny his competence? Or shall we refuse to hear Him interpret Himself, unless He abides by the canons of our liliputian philology and so called historical criticism? All this is a question of the authority of the Testaments: it is nothing besides. If the Old Testament Scripture and the New are both of God, as we assume and maintain—and if one of them is not, no logic or casuistry will ever make the other to be—then it is only what reason and reverence might look for, that the newer oracle should often expound the older after a superhuman fashion; and the puzzle created by the treatment, which the text, for example, has received

at the hands of our Lord and the Apostles, breaks up and vanishes. Fold the New Testament back upon the Old ; study the terms of our Psalm with the candles of apostolic interpretation planted round it ; and in the lofty doctrine, which we have now attempted to exhibit, you have the divine key to all the mystery and riddle of its contents. Man, now imperfectly ruling the earth and its life, has all things put under his feet ; for in the mediation and redemption of Christ, the Divine Son of Man, the work of the Devil is abolished, and all evil is finally put down, avenged, and brought to nought.

33. How sacred and august is man ! You call him puny, feeble, ignorant, erring, wicked ; and you say rightly, for so he is. But this is man seen with bleared eyes, and through the medium only of the sensible and transitory. This is partial, superficial, and temporal man ; not the very reality and fulness of the object you contemplate. Change your element, and purge your vision. View man in the perfect compass of his being ; in the long reach of his history ; in the vastness and variety of his moral capabilities ; in the high and everlasting calling with which God has called him. View him as the golden cord, which is to bind the shattered fragments of creation into a holy unity of brotherhood and of willing subjection to God. View him as the sweet-smelling incense, which is to go up on the altar of God, and to sanctify an otherwise savourless or noisome universe. View him as God's consecrated vessel, ordained for this very thing, that in him a deep and ruinous moral dishonour done to the family of God might be turned into eternal praise and glory. View him as the chief corner-stone, elect and precious, of that invisible temple of God, into which things in heaven and things on earth are finally to be

built together as living stones, and where God shall dwell for ever among those in whom He delights. View him not as he is in himself, but as he is, transfigured and re-formed, in the person and work of his Divine substitute, rescuer, and lord. Then say whether man is not great above all greatness, and reverend above all competitor and rival. It is even so. Who shall question it? Let God be true, and all besides be liars. Are we sensible of this? Did it ever dawn upon us? does it dawn upon us now? I am a creature of yesterday: I am crushed sooner than the moth: I am a child: my uttermost knowledge is alphabet and primer: I am fallen from my sonship to God, and am become an earth-worshipper, a self-worshipper, perhaps a worshipper of the Wicked One. Yet God calls me his elect; and heaven depends on me for fighting its battles; and it is my vocation to live with God and with his Christ in the everlasting home of righteousness. And this is the true and proper reading of human nature, and of the history of the world, and of the universal life of mankind, past, present, and to come. Surely it is time to think and to think again, if things be thus. God grant that we may think, all think, and thinking may act worthily of the augustness and the sanctity of our manhood!

34. Mark the secret of this untold greatness of man. If man be such as has been said, is he not a god, and ought he not to be worshipped? Surely the rationalist blasphemy is blasphemy no longer; man is divine, and adoration of himself, so far from being sin, is right and just. Let man be magnified. Nay, man is only great in redemption. It is redemption which makes whatever greatness man possesses. Apart from redemption, what is individual man? Selfish, sensual, vain, listless, super-

stitious. What is social man? Unfeeling, covetous, haughty, revengeful, cruel. What is collective man? "They are all gone out of the way; they are together become abominable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Their religion, idols of the sense or mind; their ethics, a pitiful mimicry, at best, of eternal justice and truth; their life, vanity, turbulence, outrage. So far from being lord of the world, man, considered in himself, is slave to the worst and weakest part of himself, and wholly misses the great end of his being. The last idea, which ever finds the open door of human nature, is the thought: "O Lord, Thou hast made me a little lower than the angels: how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" No! man in his primeval dignity was great in man who was to be. Man as he has been since the fall has never been great, he never can be great, but in the Second Man, the Lord from heaven. All other means of putting him on a level with himself are futile; all forces employed for the purpose expend themselves without avail. Intellect, law, civilization, science, every one of them leaves man in his moral and spiritual littleness. It is only just so far as, at sundry times and in divers manners, man has been brought into contact with redemption, that he has reached his proper stature and fulfilled his divine calling. *Christ is the greatness of man.* He, not yet incarnate, made him what he was in Eden. He, incarnate, has conferred whatever form or comeliness, strength or excellence, has distinguished him since. When a human soul is washed in the blood that redeemed the world, and by faith in Christ puts on Christ, then it becomes man, and treads the evil under foot, and is great in the true greatness of the peace and service of God. When human society comes to consist of living members

of the invisible, mystical body of the Lord Jesus, there, and only there, does it frame itself upon the model of heaven, and accomplish the purpose of God in knitting man to his fellow, and so of making him mighty against the hosts of the aliens. And never till the blessed Gospel of our redemption is published through the world, and the weary, stricken nations are taught to look to Him who was pierced, and the Spirit of Christ shall renew the face of the earth with a perfect moral renovation, shall the ideal of collective man—if we may so express it—be realised, as far as earth can ever see it realised, and God's praise be triumphantly established in the sight of his enemies. The full and final identification of the greatness of man—individual, social, and collective at once—with the redemption, will only appear, when Christ shall come the second time to be glorified in his saints, and when they who are written in the Lamb's book of life shall enter into the joy of their Lord.

35. Thus, last of all, see how the glory of man has its origin, subsistence, and perfecting in the glory of God! The Psalm begins with ascription of praise to God. It ends in like manner. And every part of it is interwoven with this ruling theme. Man's greatness, as the sacred writer exhibits it, is bounded either way by God's glory, and is never, even for a moment, dissevered from it. It is God whose name is excellent in the earth, who ordains strength for Himself by babes and sucklings, whose hands have put the crown of universal dominion upon human nature. Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things. Let God be glorified. This is the strain of the Psalm throughout. Do not the truth and reality of things accord with the inspired sentiment? And ought not all human intelligence, feeling, and life, to

accept with holy eagerness the challenge which it offers? The capacity of such a greatness in man as we have spoken of, the possession of this greatness in every mode and degree of it, the consummation which the greatness shall finally attain in the stilling of the adversary and avenger; all this presupposes, illustrates, and leads on to the glory of God. The glory of God pours forth its fullest radiance in the greatness of man. The greatness of man involves and secures, in the highest sense and measure, the glory of God. If man is little, God is dishonoured. If man recognises, accepts, and exemplifies the greatness which redemption gives him, it is glory to God, while it is well-being and felicity for himself. Man has no independent greatness: his greatness is the offspring and reflection of the Divine glory. At the same time God sets man's greatness as a candlestick to make the light of His glory shine among the creatures; and so far as man is great, so far is God glorified. When prostrate human souls spring up from the dust and war the good warfare, it is glory to God, for He has done it. As the truth of Christ spreads through the world, and families, tribes, and nations receive and obey it, God wins back by his Spirit, in the cross of Christ, the glory of which sin and its author had robbed Him. By and by, when the mystery of God is complete, and the greatness of man has reached its meridian, this very consummation will find its consummation in the glory of Him who has accomplished it.

36. "Glory to God"! This is the first instinctive outcry of man waking up to the dignity of his manhood. Translate into language the work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope of the Church of Christ; the catholic meaning of it all is, "Glory to God"! In the last and

notable day, when all things are brought to their great issue, not a creature but in dismay or gladness shall bow the knee, and give God the glory. "O Lord, our lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" will assuredly be the substance and climax for ever of that new song, which glorified souls shall sing to God and the Lamb in their Father's kingdom.

37. So shall it then be. Shall it not be so now? Shall not the ends of the earth soon see the salvation of God, and give glory to his name? O that it might be so! O that that which letteth might be taken out of the way, and that the tongues of the nations might learn to praise God! Shall not the Church of God anticipate this final *Magnificat* by a hundredfold increase of faith, and charity, and self-sacrificing zeal in the cause of the Redeemer? Would that it shone more brightly in the image of God; that the beauty and majesty of its celestial sonship were more conspicuous, attractive, and commanding, its loyalty to its Head more firm and glowing, its conquest of the earth for Him the object of its more anxious solicitude and effort! Last of all, and above all, shall not we, whom the Holy Ghost by this Scripture enlightens as to the proper dignity of our nature and vocation by the will of God, whom He summons withal, by the very character and manner of his teaching, to discharge the obligations and assume the prerogatives of our manhood—shall not we with one consent give God the glory which He thus demands of us? Let us not defraud Him of his right. Let us not by sin and indifference come short alike of his glory and our own. Let not our great representative and advocate at God's right hand wage war with the evil of the universe, and our influence, whether through neglect or hostility, be

thrown into the scale of the enemy and avenger. Let not all that is worth the name of man, all that God and Christ and angels, in the end of the world, will acknowledge as such, be lifted up to the heaven of heavens, and ourselves, man yet not man, be everlastingly cut off from our birthright, and thrust away from God as worthless pretenders to the nature made a little lower than the angels. Let God be glorified in us ! By our earnest recognition of the fact and responsibility of our calling, by our thankful entertainment of the grace and benefit of the redemption, by our intelligent, hearty, and universal surrender of ourselves to the will of Christ, by our faithful continuance in all holy well-doing to the close of life, let God be glorified ! Then, yet more fully than now, shall his adorable name be excellent in all the earth ; and with jubilant wonder and exultation, world without end, we shall come to know the mystery of that Divine wisdom and goodness, which perfects praise by babes and sucklings, and which makes the weakest of the creatures, first co-workers with Himself in his conflict with sin, then partakers with Himself in his great and everlasting victory. And to Him, the Blessed and Only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, be ascribed all honour and glory, might, majesty, and dominion, now and for ever ! Amen.

THE DIVINE FRUIT OF THE EARTH.

“IN that day shall the Branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the Fruit of the Earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof, by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”—ISAIAH IV. 2—6.

IF there be a prophecy of Christ in the Old Testament, this is one. All interpretations of the passage which make it other than such a prophecy, we distinctly set aside and reject. Some of these interpretations disagree with themselves. Others come into collision with parallel Scriptures in Isaiah or elsewhere. The rest fall fatally short of the sublime purport and scope of the prophet's inspired language. If the Holy Ghost does not here testify, prominently and conspicuously, “the sufferings of Christ,” He declares beforehand—in terms to which the sacred volume can offer few equivalents, for combined precision of doctrinal statement, and affluence of figurative illustration—“the glory that should follow” those sufferings.

1. *The first object which meets our view in the prophecy is a Note of Time.* “In that day” the events shall occur, of which the prophet speaks. And here we have no difficulty; for while the general meaning is plain from the entire drift of the prophetic paragraph, it is made most

definite by the recurrence again and again of this very note of time. We have it in the verse before the text. We have it in the eighteenth and seventh verses of the preceding chapter. We have it once more in the twentieth verse of the chapter preceding that. And in all these cases, as the slightest inspection will show, the term is used of one and the same Divine era; "the last days," spoken of in the second verse of the second chapter: "the day of the Lord of Hosts," as the period is more exactly described in the eleventh and twelfth verses of that chapter.

What is the "day of the Lord?" Our chronology will be fixed, if we can answer this question. And it is answered by the prophecy. We may know it by two signs. The first is the spiritual and moral corruption of Israel. Violence, oppression, fraud, falsehood, impurity, pride, worldliness, irreligion, hypocrisy; these will be distinguishing features of what was once God's chosen and faithful heritage. And there is a second sign: the terrible visitation of Divine judgment in the political ruin of Israel, and in war, famine, captivity, and manifold affliction. Jerusalem should be cast down, and Judah should fall. The men of might should perish by the sword and the battle. Instead of the beauty and personal ornaments which the women of Israel worshipped in place of God, there should be seen the disfiguration of the branding-iron, and the robe of sackcloth. The daughters of Zion should sit in desolation on the ground. And the proud, and haughty, and lifted up should go into the rock, and hide them in the dust, because the Lord had arisen to shake terribly the earth. This is "that day," of which the text speaks, as to the general character of it,—a day of sin and apostasy from God on the one hand, a day

of grievous Divine retribution and vengeance on the other.

Where are we to find it? We can hardly doubt, that, in using these words, the Holy Spirit contemplated, in part at least, the overthrow of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and the seventy years' captivity of the idolatrous and sinful people in Babylon. And there are portions of the prophetic description, both of the internal and outward condition of the church of God at that crisis, which answer better, perhaps, to it than to any other period of the history. It should be remembered, however, that prophecy, if it have not a double, or in other words an equivocal, meaning—as it has not—has almost always a meaning beyond the nearest and most obvious application of it. It has one meaning, one only; but that one meaning appears in the accomplishment, now as a bud, now as a blossom, now as ripe fruit. There is germination, expansion, development, perfecting. And whereas the text is precisely one of those Scriptures in which analogy would lead us to look for such a progress and outgrowth of prophecy, we might question, on this ground, whether the application of it to the events just indicated can be allowed to be exhaustive. But, apart from this, the very terms of the passage forbid our limiting the reference to these events. The days, which the prophet foretells, are “the last days.” Rather, inasmuch as they have all the same great features, they are a single day; a day wholly unlike the days that went before it; one in which man, hitherto master of the eras, shall no longer have any propriety, and which, however many its predecessors, shall be followed by no afterday; the last of all days; the day which God shall make and claim as his own, and through which He shall reign with a sure

and manifest dominion; the terminal, consummate, unbroken, everlasting "day of the Lord of Hosts." Now the meaning of the prophecy culminates; who can fail to see it? When the cup of Israel's iniquity was not only filling, but full; when "scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," walked in the high places of the church; when Judah had lost the sceptre, and there was no king but Cæsar; when the long restrained, or partially manifested wrath of God broke upon the reprobate elect without measure; when Jerusalem, persisting still to stone and to slay those that were sent to her, was finally trodden under foot of the Gentiles amidst flame and blood; "in that day"—the day of utter religious sterility and punitive desolation, of midnight darkness and horror, moral and providential—should spring forth the glorious, immortal light, the unmatched beauty and bloom, of which the prophet goes on to speak. Thus,

II. *A Wonderful and Illustrious Personage is brought before us, the author of a spiritual restitution.* "In that day shall the Branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the Fruit of the Earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel." There shall be a concurrence, that is to say, of Israel's fall in one sense, and of her rise in another: the death of the church is to be its resurrection to new and higher life. This is the doctrine. And it does not stand alone. There is scarcely a more striking characteristic of the prophecies of Isaiah, than the frequency with which they associate and link together these two events. Compare, for example, the end of the first chapter with the beginning of the second; or the end of the thirty-first, near the middle of the book, with the beginning of the thirty-second. Mark, too, how these same Divine dispensations

cross and interlace each other in the concluding chapters of the prophecy. At all these points—and they are but examples of a class—a great salvation, primarily and mainly a spiritual one, is described as attending and distinguishing “the day of the Lord;” and it is attributed, without exception, to the advent of a Divine Prophet, Deliverer, and Prince, who, while executing God’s vengeance, and taking away iniquity, should restore the waste places, and make the wilderness to bud and blossom as the rose. It is so in the text. Just as the church sinks in its last catastrophe, there are beauty and glory, majesty and splendour; and it is the Lord’s Branch, and the Earth’s Fruit, which is to constitute and create them.

And here we have matter of more than amazement. Hundreds of years before the coming of Christ, He is described with scarcely less nicety of theological language than as if the early Christian centuries had already discussed the questions of his natures and person, and had embodied their decisions in formal creeds. Two figurative expressions are employed by the prophet to designate the Restorer—expressions which picture most clearly and forcibly the realities for which they stand. The glory of the latter days is to shine in the appearing of the Lord’s Branch—the Offshoot, that is to say, of Jehovah; a Being, whose being springs of his being; essentially, inseparably, unchangeably, everlastingly one with Him; partaker of the wealth and fulness of his incommunicable attributes: an Infinite Spirit, because He is an Infinite Spirit; like Him, all-mighty, all-wise, all-pure, all-good: all that the living branch is to the living tree, only as much more as the immaterial excels the material, and the Divine the creaturely. The Word—the personal utterance of God’s unuttered mind; the Son—the personal manifes-

tation of God's hidden and undiscovered life ; "the Branch of the Lord"—the eternal outgrowth of God's unoriginated being ; He is to be the Saviour. It is not a solitary representation of Scripture. Twice in Jeremiah, twice in Zechariah, the same term, "Jehovah's Branch," is employed in the same sense and with the same application. God should work the restoration of the last age by one who sprang of Himself, and who should therefore count it no robbery to be equal with God. Is it a mystery too high for us ? Let mystery open the door to mystery. The Branch of the Lord is the restorer : the restorer is the Fruit of the Earth. One salvation, and one author of it, and He at once the child of earth and of heaven ! Earth is to bear what heaven had borne before it. The Offspring of God becomes the Offspring of Man. That Plant of Renown, which had flourished only in the presence of God and of the angels, now shoots forth as a stem out of the dry ground of our poor human life, without form or comeliness. Heaven and earth join, so as to make of twain one new Man, thus making all things new. Is it not wonderful—this theology of pre-Christian Scripture ? The Branch of the Lord is the Fruit of the Earth. The heavenly is not the same as the earthly, nor the earthly as the heavenly. Jehovah's Offshoot is not transmuted into anything which it was not ; and the growth of earth, notwithstanding its lofty alliance, remains still what it was, in all that belongs to its constitution and essence. But the two become one ; two natures ineffably combined in one Person : "the Man, whose name is the Branch ;" the Lord from heaven made flesh and tabernacling among us, full of grace and truth. So the Old Testament anticipates the New. So the New Testament echoes, corroborates, and expounds the Old.

And with the incarnation of God, as thus announced by the prophet, the daybreak of a blessed, spiritual restitution throws its light upon the world. Evil being all-dominant, and retributive destruction spread far and wide; the holy law powerless; the ordinances of religion a vain show; justice and mercy extinct; the light vanished from the cherubim; God frowning on his people, and delivering his heritage to its enemies; "in that day" the coming of the Lord's Anointed should inaugurate a state of things, in comparison of which the highest glory that had gone before it should be eclipsed and fade away. New heavens and a new earth should be created, the habitation of righteousness. A new Jerusalem should spring out of the ashes of its historical and material predecessor, the mother not of Abraham's natural descendants only, but of all who should tread in the footsteps of Abraham's faith. Here the living Israelites should find a quiet, safe, and immovable dwelling-place. Through the open gates of this city of God the nations from afar should pour continually for worship and praise. And instead of the sun and the moon—mere temporary lamps of an unenduring dispensation—to light it, the Lord should be her everlasting light, and her God her glory. Such is the general view which Isaiah gives of the advent and reign of Jehovah's Branch in the times of the end. In the text, however, we have more than generalities.

III. *The Method, Subjects, and Nature of the Christian Restitution are minutely described by the prophet.*

1. *The Restitution is to be introduced by the purging away of sin.* "When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the

spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning," then "shall the Branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, . . . excellent and comely." Have we not read of Him whose fan was in his hand, and who should thoroughly purge his floor, gathering the wheat into his garner, whilst He burnt up the chaff with unquenchable fire? The sense of that Scripture is the sense of this. The events referred to there, were the fulfilment, in part, of what is intended here. The terrible words of the great Prophet, by their enforcement of the spirituality of religion, of the claims of the Divine law, and of the sanctions of God's moral government, should track iniquity to its strongholds, and drive it in confusion from the house of God. The sacrifice of the cross, demanded by the righteousness of God, and exhibiting that righteousness, while it provided for the forgiveness of sinners, should render sin, to a degree in which it had never before been, inexcusable and ruinous. Finally, Christ, as the Mediator-King, with fire and sword avenging the quarrel of God upon polluted and murderous Israel, should prepare the way for the building of a new and mystical Jerusalem, from which all filthiness of flesh and soul should be shut out by the mighty indwelling of the Spirit of God, and whose consecrated walls and gates should be "Holiness unto the Lord" for ever. Thus the restitution is described, as based upon the downfall of evil. Remark, further, that

2. *Specific limits are drawn, within which the glory of the God-Man, the author of the Restitution, is to manifest itself.* Christ is glorious in his person, attributes, offices, work. He is "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." It is a relative glory, however, which is here spoken of. He is

“beautiful and glorious,” “excellent and comely,” for “them that are escaped of Israel;” and it is “he that remaineth in Jerusalem, even every one that is written among the living” there, to whom, above all others, the Deliverer is to be a diadem of salvation, and an ornament of praise. These are they, before whose eyes He shall reveal his splendour, and who shall see Him as He is.

The meaning is not difficult to trace. As the sword and the fire—the literal sword and fire—would not destroy all in the final overthrow of Jerusalem; as there would be some, a residue and election of grace, who escaping should remain in the city after the siege and sack, and accordingly might be registered as survivors of the ruin: so, when “the spirit of judgment and of burning” did its work in that higher sense which has been explained, a work affecting not the Jewish people only, but all nations of the earth through all time, there would be those who should “escape” the sword of the word by obeying it; who, when the armed and flaming justice of God divided the joints and marrow, and searched the recesses of the soul, should “remain” unscathed, because the Cross had become to them “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;” and whom the laws of Christ’s kingdom should ordain to eternal salvation, and write “in the book of life,” by reason of their lowly subjection of themselves to his authority and grace. In other words, the Branch of Jehovah, in the restitution of the last days, is to be the glory not of the Jews only, but, as St. Paul writes in the Romans, “also of the (believing) Gentiles;” or, as St. James, quoting from the prophecy of Amos, puts it, “the residue of men, and all the Gentiles,” who should seek unto the Lord; that “remnant” which Isaiah

elsewhere defines, who turn unto God, "the mighty God"—an expression used of Christ in the ninth chapter—and who lean upon Him in truth, and become righteous before Him. Such are the favoured ones, to whom the Branch of the Lord and the Fruit of the Earth will be glorious. Is it hard to translate this language of the Old Testament into that of the New? They are they, who, coming out from among the ungodly, and being separate, "escape" the pollution that is in the world through evil desire. They are they, who are justified with God through faith in Jesus Christ, and who therefore, in the very presence of God's inexorable law, "remain" accepted and approved. They are they, whom the regenerating Spirit has begotten to newness of "life," and whose names are written in heaven as "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Last of all, in words full of inspiriting meaning,

3. *The prophet sets forth the Blessed Character of the Restitution, for those who are the subjects of it.*

It is a Restitution of individual sanctity. Of all the inhabitants of the Jerusalem which is from above, not one but shall be holy. "He that is left and remaineth," even every one "written among the living"—shall be called "holy." This is the substance and soul of the glory of the Heavenly Branch, as His servants are to possess it. Himself glorious in holiness, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," the very object of his appearing as the Fruit of the Earth was to put away sin. "When He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high," that all who believe might come unto the Father through Him, having their hearts cleansed from an evil conscience, and might present themselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. Holiness, not in man's sight, but in God's—re-

nunciation of sin, purgation from guilt, the active presence and dominion within us of the spirit of sanctity, the universal working of righteousness—this is at once the demand and the gift of the Gospel, the unvarying badge of the Christian citizenship, and the great, all-comprehending prerogative of those who receive the evangelical salvation. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;” such is the law of the state which Christ founded. The members of that state are “holy brethren,” washed and sanctified from evil by the blood and the Spirit of Christ. This is the grace of their commonwealth. Christ becomes beautiful and glorious to his people; for in his doctrine, sacrifice, and mediatorial reign, they are made holy as God is holy. Holy truth, the knowledge of it; holy peace, the experience of it; holy living, the practice of it—universal characteristics these of all whom the Gospel writes in the book of elect souls!

The Restitution is one of abundantly heightened church privilege. In the local, terrestrial Jerusalem men shall not worship the Father in the fulness of the ages. If the text and its parallels be studied in the light of the New Testament, they will be found to contain little or nothing that is definite as to any re-edification of the former external and worldly prosperity of the church of God. The entire genius of the Gospel is opposed to such a view of their purport. Old Testament prophecy sinks the physical and temporal in a far more august issue. The glory of God shall not be limited in “the last days,” as it was before, to the beautiful house on Moriah, and to the worshipping congregations assembled there. It shall not restrict itself even to Mount Zion, though the term be taken in its greatest extension, as equivalent to the whole

of Jerusalem regarded as the consecrated habitation of God. All this is too little, too narrow. The ancient metropolis of the church shall lengthen her cords, and strengthen her stakes, and spread abroad her curtains. A Zion shall rise in the earth, wide as the earth, every part of it covered over with the dwellingplaces of spiritual Israelites, and hallowed throughout its whole area by assemblies of devout and joyful worshippers. They shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall dwell in the Christian city of God. "From one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship" before the Lord. The ancient distinction between the sacrificing priesthood and the non-sacrificing congregation shall now be done away. The "chosen generation," and "peculiar people," of the last times, while it is "a holy nation," shall be "a royal priesthood" also, every member of the consecrated host presenting "the fruit of the lips" to God, and waving before Him a censer charged with the fragrance of Christian love and prayer. The light of truth, no longer shining between the cherubim only, shall break forth in all hearts, as the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The blood of sprinkling, once a merely local and periodical purgation of the flesh, shall be transmuted into that ever-availing, ever-efficacious sacrifice, which cleanses the conscience from dead works, and purifies, with a final and complete purification, all them that are sanctified. A glorious high throne, higher far than that of the natural Zion, shall be the place of Christ's sanctuary; so high that, from one end of the earth to the other, where two or three are gathered together in his name, He shall be in the midst of them. Not one of God's elect but shall be

partaker of good which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, through the love of the Spirit, and the mighty intercession and grace of the exalted Son. Once more :

The Restitution shall never be impaired, or pass away. We speak now of earthly things ; it is fitting we should do so. Prominently and chiefly earth, not heaven, is the theatre and sphere of the glory, of which Isaiah here discourses. But if this be the case, a question arises, and a grave one. What guarantee have we for the perpetuity of the church of the restitution ? Will it not, in the nature of things, come under the conditions of earth, and so be liable to change, decay, and dissolution ? May not the sun smite it by day, or the moon by night ? May not the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon it, and cause it to fall with a fall from which it shall never rise again ? May it not go astray, and lose itself in the windings and wastes of the wilderness, and perish, with none to help it ? May not enemies, wiser and mightier than itself, encompass and assail it, and repeat, only on a far larger scale, the demolition which put a period to the honours of the ancient city of God.

The prophecy anticipates our doubts, and disposes of them. The restitution shall be as permanent as it shall be glorious. The demands of duty, in the providence of God, may be such that the church shall be ready to faint and to give up the ghost, like a man who journeys or toils under the vehement blaze of the sun shining in his strength. Or, like a wayfarer suddenly overtaken by a howling tempest, the church may be beaten and buffeted by manifold afflictions, so as well-nigh to despair of life. Why should not its members find themselves in circumstances like these ? They may : they will. Only,

wherever and whenever the evil shall come, "there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert," whether by day or night, "from storm and from rain." "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Both for individual members of the church, and for the church collectively, the omnipotent throne of grace, and the immortal Spirit of love and consolation, are a joy which will swallow up all sorrow, and a shelter, the quiet and security of which no mischief can ever violate.

It is quite possible, amidst the crossings and complications of the Christian service, that occasions of perplexity and embarrassment may arise, when there will be danger of missing the right way, and of following a deceit or a phantom through paths the end of which is death. The working and progress of human affairs, too, may now and again place the church in circumstances, in which it may scarcely know what course to pursue, and whether this or that be the will of Him, whose representative and minister she is to mankind. And, considering what the church is, and what its state must of necessity be between the time of its exodus from the house of bondage, and its final settlement in its rest—how weak it is in itself, how the world abhors the truth and sanctity of which it is the trustee, and at what advantages it may always be taken by a hostile power; it is certain that error, wickedness, and hatred of God will do their best to thwart, bewilder, cripple, circumvent, and destroy it.

The brightness of Jehovah's Branch, however, shall not pale or grow dim. For "the Lord will create

upon every dwellingplace of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night : for upon all the glory shall be a defence." He, who sent his guiding, protecting angel before the church in the wilderness, will not leave it, in its fuller expansion and splendour, to take its own course, and to draw for strength upon its own resources. He shall teach it the way it should go, and will effectually guard it from the wiles and attacks of the devil. As the pillar of darkness and flame led Israel forward in their marches in the desert, or covered the tabernacle in the midst, when the congregation rested ; as that pillar was at all times a rampart and defence, which no enemy might break through to hurt and devour ; so the Spirit of God given to the church, and the providence of God working for the church, shall lead its living members, on to the end of the world, in the way everlasting, and shall constitute a power within it, against which the gates of hell shall never be strong enough to prevail. Upon all the far-reaching glory of the last days, its Zion, its dwellingplaces, its assemblies, its tabernacle, there shall be the defence of the outspread wings of Him who liveth for ever and ever. His dread darkness and his dazzling light, while they shall lead the way of his people, and inspire them with holy confidence and gladness of heart, shall so cover the place of his sanctuary, and so enwrap and screen his spiritual camp and city, that all its adversaries shall be confounded, and their uttermost spite and violence shall prove but the presages and instruments of their own final downfall. They shall never perish who dwell in God's habitation, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand. He will be their "refuge, and strength, a very present help in trouble." The truth of the Gospel

shall never die out in the earth. The ministry of the Gospel shall never pass away. The ordinances of the Gospel shall never cease to be celebrated. "As the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, saith the Lord"—they are the dying words of Isaiah's prophecy—so shall the "seed and name" of the Gospel church "remain:" and its members shall "go forth, and look upon the men that have transgressed against" God. "For their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." "The saints of the Most High," as the prophet Daniel speaks, "shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever."

These are the earthly things. There are heavenly things answering to them, things of which the earthly are only symbols, counterparts, and imperfectly developed rudiments. "The day of the Lord of hosts" is strictly and literally everlasting. The glory of Jehovah's Branch, as the prophet describes it, is in the fullest sense of the term an indestructible and immortal glory. The material creation, as it now is, will by and by perish. The existing constitution of the church, so far as it pertains to this world, will sooner or later be dissolved. The glory of the Lord's last day will survive all changes, itself unchanged, otherwise than as receiving fresh accessions of splendour and beauty for ever.

Let our faith bestir itself and rise to its proper stature. Above us yonder, we shall descry a realm of being and life, with which the earthly things of the text are essentially one, but which yet is loftier, more wide-reaching, and such as, by its very nature, guarantees the eternal continuance of all that pertains to it. What do we see? We see "the city of the living God, the heavenly

Jerusalem” ; we see “ an innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven ” ; we see “ God, the Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect ” ; we see “ Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling ” in the holy of holies not made with hands—objects some of them identical with those which make the glory of the latter days on the earth ; but united with these objects, there are others implying a wider range of the Divine government, and pointing to a consummation and perfecting of the church yet to be accomplished. We strain our eager gaze down the course of the ages ; and the earthly is passed into the heavenly. Angels no longer descend the ladder of light to minister to saints in the flesh ; and saints no longer cast off the bondage of corruption, and mount upward into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The higher has absorbed and assimilated the lower. The lower has risen into a glorious, unchangeable, and everlasting unity with the higher. Dimly, yet surely, we discern the eternal city of God, with the holy nations walking in the light of it ; and we catch the sound of the chimes of the bells of its sanctuaries, “ ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands ; ” and answering to these, as the voice of mighty thunders, there is the rapturous song of the redeemed worshippers ; while above and around all, we see the blaze of that awful holiness, which is the impregnable defence of its glory, and which, excluding whatever defileth and maketh a lie, is the eternal security and joy of those who are written in the book of life. Now the glory of the Branch of the Lord and the Fruit of the Earth is perfect ; for the corruptible has put on incorruption, and the mortal immortality, and the un-

divided household of God beholds Christ as He is. But here we are above ourselves, and shall do well to pause. Enough for us that we know, that the habitation of God shall be eternally with men, and that they shall see his face, and bear his name on their foreheads.

IV. *The Prophet's language suggests impressive Lessons of Christian Truth and Practice.*

1. *It connects the spiritual blessing of the last days with the putting away of sin.* As a fact of history, the Gospel rears itself upon the overthrow of moral evil. When an end had been made of transgression by the sword of Christ's mouth, by the sufferings which He underwent as our substitute, and by the pouring out of his anger upon the wicked, then the way was open for the entrance and march of everlasting righteousness. And as a divine economy of grace and salvation, the Gospel takes its stand upon the same platform. It calls upon all men everywhere to repent. Its ministers are charged with the duty of preaching repentance as a necessary qualification for the enjoyment of its privileges. And it is only as iniquity is forsaken, that the Branch of the Lord ever becomes glorious, whether to an age, a country, a church, a home, or an individual human soul. God's people, every one of those "written among the living," is holy. Holiness, so far at least as it is the renunciation of sin, is the condition and measure of grace, while in other respects it is the fruit and result of it.

Here is the secret of dark, mediæval centuries, of huge areas of the earth yet unevangelized, of corrupt, and feeble, and tottering churches, of a social and family life, which is the shame and dismay of Christendom, and of the ignorance, unhappiness, and ambiguous spiritual character of many who bear the name of the Redeemer.

And here, too, is the secret of the strength of the Gospel, and of that general revival and universal prevalence of its authority, which we anxiously look for. Sin is the one barrier in the way of the world-wide manifestation of the glory of the heavenly Branch. The abandonment of sin, wherever and so far as it takes place, is the signal for the outbreak of this glory. It is a miserable theology, which does not teach the need of a complete and immediate renunciation of sin on the part of all who would inherit the grace of the Christian restitution. And that is a sorry ministry, which, under any pretext, philosophical or otherwise, ignores or seeks to get rid of that strait gate of repentance and amendment of life, which God has fixed at the head of the path to heaven. Let all who desire the salvation of Christ, whether for themselves or others, see well to it, that the way is made plain by the repudiation and utter surrender of the evil and abominable thing, which God's soul hateth.

2. *Christ is the Alpha and Omega of the Restitution; and He is to be recognised and honoured accordingly.* The glory of those who flee from sin, who are left when the storm of God's anger passes over, who live before God, written in his book, is all an imputed and reflected glory. Christ is the author of it; Christ only. It has no existence apart from Christ. He is our peace: we lie under the curse without Him. He is our strength: in us, "that is, in our flesh dwelleth no good thing;" we "do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth" us. He is our hope: but for his atonement, there is nothing besides "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Therefore let Christ be magnified: this is what the text says.

Let Him be magnified in our Creed. We rehearse the

Articles of our Belief. And it is well. But let us be careful that Christ—his person, his offices, his work—holds his rightful place among them. Christianity is Christ; and “the Faith” is no faith, it is a falsehood and a deception, which does not confess the Divine, incarnate, suffering, priestly Mediator, as the beginning and ending of all the truth which it contains and carries with it.

Let Christ be magnified in our Ministry. What is the Christian ministry without Christ? What ought it to be? The ministry which maunders over the outworks of the Gospel; which lounges about its shrines, and dotes upon the beading and embroidery of its temple-cloths; which mumbles the dogmas of a shallow and impertinent philosophy in the very blaze of its supernatural revelations; which spirits away the atonement into a conceit, an idea, a nothing: the ministry, which strips the Lord that bought us of his Godhead, and tricks Him out in the gewgaws of a profane sentimentality and will-worship; which holds out serpents and stones to hungry souls in place of the bread of heaven, and with dismal infatuation shuts alike against itself and its fellows the open door of everlasting life—perish that ministry, even be it ours!

Once more, let Christ be magnified in the personal Conduct and Life of all his People, by a prompt and grateful appropriation of the merits of his passion, and by an absolute and unwavering consecration to his blessed will. Believe the love which God has for you in his Son. Fix the eye of your intelligence upon Him, that you may comprehend his glorious character and work. Put vain thoughts aside, and let Christ fill the hemisphere of your spiritual vision. Make Him your meditation and song in the house of your pilgrimage. Rest in his propitiation. Live within the consecrated circle of his mediatorial grace.

Keep his commandments. Follow his goings. Shine in his image. Speak aloud of his mercy and power.

3. *Finally, a Prospect of Good to Come is opened here to the view of the Church such as may well fill it with reverent confidence, and with high and holy hope.* Is the grace of God, which we now enjoy, all that is intended by the wonderful language of the text? Are God's merciful purposes in the mission of his Son, as here set before us, met by the ordinary knowledge, sanctity, and active virtues of professing Christians? Can the Mount Zion, that now is, be as thickly occupied with holy dwellings, and as joyful in holy convocations, as Isaiah saw it in the visions of God? And does it cover the earth, as the waters the sea? Alas! all as yet is rudiment, alphabet, infancy! The Branch of the Lord, it is true, has already become beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely. The ages that are gone have seen the splendour of his mediatorial majesty; and the age that is passing sees it, as perhaps no previous epoch of the church's history ever did. But the past and the present are only a hint and glimpse of what the Spirit of God designs by the prophet's sublime apocalypse. There is not an individual servant of Christ, who may not find in this Scripture at once matter for shame and self-rebuke, and incentive to the largest expectations of blessing from God. What ripeness of heavenly knowledge, what overflowing of holy peace, what firmness and energy of religious character, what wealth of Divine consolations, what strong protection and unfailing guidance, what abundant admission into God's everlasting kingdom, does not this glorious prophecy assure us of! And the church in general, the struggling, sore-bested, and weary church, while it has reason enough, with words of the Spirit such as these in its ears, to start and be

amazed at the languor and feebleness which mark it ; how bright a future does the prophet spread before the eyes of its desire and faith ! The church shall not miscarry. Its enemies shall not prevail against it ; they shall come to nought. The true, spiritual, living church of the Lord Jesus shall wax mightier and mightier with the lapse of the centuries, and with the discipline of trial and labour, to which its great Head shall subject it. All appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, it shall subdue the earth for its Lord ; and itself, purified and exalted by its sacred toils, shall eventually become, in very deed, “a glorious church, having neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing.” Then the uttermost fulfilment of the prophetic oracle cannot be far distant. The former things will pass away, and all things become new. And the Branch of the Lord and the Fruit of the Earth, historically one in the Word made flesh, and mystically one in the unity of Christ and his people, shall for ever and ever, beyond all that Christian faith has looked for, become glorious in the celestial triumph of the Lamb that was slain, and of his redeemed and consecrated servants.

WISDOM JUSTIFIED OF HER CHILDREN.

“But wisdom is justified of all her children.”—LUKE VII. 35.

[“But wisdom is justified of her works.”—MATT. XI. 19, as read in the Sinai and Vatican MSS.]

THE words have the air of a proverb, and many lips may have uttered them before they were spoken by Christ. In his mouth they were new. He took these old and earthly things, and lifted them up and beatified them.

The circumstances under which He spoke are familiar. John in the prison, hearing the fame of Christ, sent disciples, asking Him whether He was the Messiah or no. He did this not simply for the benefit of the messengers; still less because he was himself in serious doubt. He was at the time in great trial, and in all probability acted under stress of temptation. I was called, he might think, to be the forerunner of Christ. It was my task and function to make his paths plain. How strangely I am dealt with! My work suspended; my person in bonds; my life in jeopardy! And that Jesus, whom I baptized in the Jordan, on whom I saw—surely I did see!—the Holy Ghost pour the consecrating oil of Messiahship, and whose wonderful works my disciples now tell me of, makes no sign of recognition, speaks not a word of sympathy, leaves me to battle alone with this dark providence. Can He be very Christ? We know the sequel. Jesus wrought a series of miracles in the presence of the messengers; then sent them back, bidding them report what they had seen,

and to add this special message to their master, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me!" As if He had said, Let not thy faith fail. Let it not be a stumbling block to thee that thou art as thou art, and that I seem not to heed thee. The miracles which thy disciples have witnessed will certify thee that it is not for want of power that I do not interfere. It is of God that thou sufferest thus. Thou art decreasing, as thou saidst. Be of good cheer. It shall be well with thee. Happy are they that believe with a faith which is never scandalised.

But this was not all. The occasion was one to be improved for the general purposes of Christ's mission. He was surrounded by men, mostly poor and ignorant and socially despised, who had gladly heard the preaching of the Baptist, and now as gladly listened to his own. Others were about Him, all but exclusively belonging to the instructed and reputable classes, who, filled with selfishness, worldly idolatry, and pride before God and man, had rejected John, and in turn were shutting their ears to the voice of Christ. And with this diverse congregation in his presence, knowing likewise full well how truly they represented all others of mankind, whether individuals or masses, to whom the Gospel of God should come, as soon as John's disciples were gone, He began to speak strong yet gracious words, such as befitted the circumstances, addressed not only to his hearers then present, but to mankind at large of all generations.

We shall remember how He vindicated the character of John against the slur thrown upon it because of his austerities; how He claimed for Himself the dignity of a Divine commission, though, unlike John, He lived the ordinary life of his age and country; how, with simple but withering illustration, He exposed the hypocrisy of

men who always found excuse for their irreligion in the accessories of God's dispensations ; how sadly yet terribly He foretold the doom of sinners such as these ; how, both by teaching and prayer, He expressed the joy with which He joyed over the children of wisdom, publicans and harlots some of them, who went into the kingdom of heaven, while Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, were sent empty away ; how, last of all, with the Baptist, and Himself, and his congregation, and his personal work on earth, and the past, and the future, and time, and eternity all in view, He announced the great doctrine and principle of the text, at once so benign in its aspects and yet so solemn, touching wisdom and her household.

What is the wisdom, let us ask, of which Christ here speaks ? We might very properly understand by it wisdom in general, whether as it exists in God or in the rational creature. The words would hold under this widest and most comprehensive definition. The connection, however, points to a narrower sense. It is wisdom as it belongs to the sphere of the spiritual, to which Christ's eye was specially directed. Nor does even this, taken in all its fulness and compass, appear to be intended. What is meant is the moral wisdom of God—if we may so speak—the wisdom which has framed and adjusted the constitution of his holy government ; which determines the states, relations, duties, rights, and ultimate condition of the creatures ; and which makes it its object to assimilate all intelligent being to its own lofty nature, to mirror itself in the character and beneficent activities of all, and so to fill the universe with order, beauty, and blessing. More particularly still, it is that marvellous procedure of the Divine mind and will by which God seeks to recover fallen man to Himself, to re-establish in individual souls and

throughout the world the jurisdiction of his perfect law, and to bring to eternal glory all those of mankind whom the probation of life shall authenticate as worthy of the grace.

This Divine Wisdom is personified by our Lord. Do we wonder at this, when we call to mind the fact that there is a Personal Wisdom of God, who was with God in the beginning of his ways, and that the speaker was that very Wisdom incarnate? Here, however, we have personification only. Wisdom is a parent, and has children. There are those among the creatures who partake of her nature, who bear upon them her image and superscription, who are like her as human sons and daughters resemble those from whom they spring. Some of them are in heaven, and always have been—morning stars, who ushered in the mundane creation, and whose light has never paled. Children of Wisdom, because they kept their first estate when they might have lost it through sin, and all down the course of their unknown history have been steadfast in their allegiance to God. Others are with them in their glorious dwelling-place, who were not always there—spirits advanced thither from a lower estate of creature dignity. Human souls are these, made perfect in paradise. Also children of Wisdom; for the alternative being put to them, during their earthly life, of the temporary pleasures of sin or the incorruptible good of eternity, they made the right choice, and their angels, therefore, do always behold the face of their Father in heaven. But the children of Wisdom intended by our Lord are neither the elder nor the younger members of God's celestial family. They are flesh and blood, like ourselves, human inhabitants of this lower and material world. And with the circumstances under which Christ

uttered the text in our thoughts, it will be easy to define them.

Plainly they are the precise opposite of that wicked and perverse generation, the representatives of which were around Christ while He spoke, and whose religious self-complacency, capriciousness, and indifference He so forcibly pictures and reprobates. Now the capital sins of these unhappy men, the Pharisees and lawyers who rejected God's counsel concerning them, were worldliness and pride. They went into the wilderness to see a prophet. He was nothing to them as soon as they caught sight of the leathern girdle and the camel's hair. What was such a teacher to men who sought the king's palace and the trappings of the courtier? Besides, his doctrine! The pedigree of angels, if you please. The subtleties of theological dogma and moral casuistry, nothing more welcome to us. The elaborate prescriptions of ecclesiastical order and police, all honour to them always. But repentance and works meet for it! And so the Baptist was left to his desert preaching. Nor was it otherwise with Christ; for though John's ruggedness was wanting, there was the same obnoxious message; and He therefore had no comeliness that He should be desired. And all down the lines of human history these same features have marked the children of folly; they have been worldly-minded, and they have been proud. Not so the children of Wisdom. They are unworldly and lowly. Under every dispensation, under every guise, this has been their character. Scarce venturing to lift their eyes towards heaven because of sin and unworthiness, they notwithstanding set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth, and steadfastly refuse to allow their interest to be absorbed by any object short of the lofty home, where the parent

Wisdom lives in light and love for ever. Surely it cannot be difficult to describe these blessed ones of mankind, as they belong to our own age, and to our own economy of religious grace and obligation. They are they who renounce this vain world in favour of the spiritual service of Christ, and who truly believe in the God-Man of Bethlehem and of Calvary as the Divine Saviour of their souls.

In the text Christ delivers an oracle respecting the children of Wisdom, one that distinctly embraces each and all of them. Wisdom is justified of her children. His language supposes, that Wisdom is not passive but active, and that her action is authoritative and influential. She so bears Herself, and so works, as to subject her doings to the moral judgments of the creatures. Her parental relation to them, in the general appointment, disposition, and ordering of things, in the rule and administration of the world, and in the several treatment which those under her charge receive at her hands, is such as that they can approve or disapprove, commend or censure, justify or condemn her proceedings. And as matter of fact the children of Wisdom all justify her.

Observe, Wisdom is not said to be made just by her children. The righteousness of the Heavenly Wisdom is superior to all the moral estimates, which may be put upon her. Wisdom was with God in the beginning of his ways before his works of old. She is unoriginated, independent, absolute, immortal. If all the universe were to clap its hands in admiration of her, she would not be a whit more perfect. Supposing it possible—it is not possible—that all the universe should cry out in condemnation, the righteousness of Wisdom would remain as before, having neither spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing. Wisdom works in accordance with the Divine con-

stitution of things, and with the relations which grow out of that constitution ; and her whole procedure, however it may be regarded, is stamped with the infallible and changeless perfection of Him, whose attribute and minister she is. But while the children of Wisdom do not make her just, they justify her, all of them do so, and that in a two-fold sense.

There is a justification of Wisdom by her children, which is independent of their own will and choice. It is furnished as the sure result of the movement and progress of the Divine dispensations. These dispensations not unfrequently wrap themselves in mystery. It may pass all creature comprehension, how they can comport either with the character of God or with the interests of his servants. The keenest spiritual insight on the part of the children of Wisdom, and their most reverent and submissive acquiescence in her will may leave the problem unsolved. Still they justify her ; for their history sooner or later is a visible assertion, vindication, and demonstration of her perfectness.

It may be there was once a time, when it was hard for angels to reconcile the Divine will respecting them with the Wisdom which determined that will. The riddle has been long cleared up. Though there was delay, the revelation came at last, and did not tarry. The glory of God's inscrutable attributes blazed forth with a radiance above the brightness of the sun, and Wisdom was justified of her children.

So with mankind both in the past and in the present. How strange that Adam in innocence should have been placed within reach of temptation to sin ! How utterly inexplicable, that millions on millions of mankind should have needed, that many of them should have cried out for

light from heaven, and that only a few feeble rays of truth have shot across their midnight sky! What a moral perplexity, that Christ should be sitting in heaven as king of the earth, and that He should allow his church to suffer and to struggle as it does! And the personal trial of godly people, our own trial—how can it be brought to harmonize with the character of the all-wise, all-blessed God? Here again, the children of Wisdom justify her. The march of the ages and the course of individual life have in innumerable instances cleared away the mystery from the face of God's procedure. What a flaming illumination did the cross throw back over the centuries and the dispensations! Who does not know how the darkest passages in the history of the Church have led the way before it to a new and glorious daybreak. And how often, as human life goes on, does the outcry of our anguish, because God's sword has pierced us, turn on an instant into a loud and passionate hosanna! Redemption and Providence furnish us with a thousand certificates that the doctrine of the text is literally true. Shortly the great tribunal and everlasting life will open the last seal, and beyond all scruple or misgiving will make it manifest to the entire aggregate of the creatures, that Wisdom has only acted like herself in all the wonderful complex and enigma of her parental rule.

At the same time this inevitable and necessary justification of Wisdom by her works is not peculiar to her children. The household of folly, only less than that of Wisdom, justifies her thus. God is glorified in his saints; and in other respects and under other forms He is glorified in those who, refusing to be saints, abide eternally in the curse and corruption of sin.

The justification, to which the stress of the text goes, is

a voluntary one. Acting under the grace of the Spirit of God, the children of Wisdom, with a ready mind, by word and deed, endorse the "good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

The procedure of the Divine Government being what it is, it is not wonderful if the creatures, prompted by unholy will, should be led to resent it. And such has been the fact. Angels once did this, and dropped for ever out of the family of Wisdom. Multitudes of mankind, from the time the earth was born, have done the same, and have either never found their way into the family, or entering have left it to return no more. The melancholy process still goes on before our eyes. Wisdom instructs—the Wisdom which speaks from the cross and from the mercy-seat. We have no ears to hear; perhaps we stop our ears, that we may not hear, or hearing we resist the Holy Ghost. Wisdom offers spiritual blessing. We doubt the reality of it, haggle over the terms of it, spend life in balancing it against the things which perish in the using, and practically if not theoretically pronounce it wanting. Wisdom commands. We chafe, we fret, we mutter, we complain, we disobey. Wisdom schools and disciplines. Our peevishness cries out against her dispensations as unmeaning, arbitrary, harsh, roughhanded, cruel. Wisdom promises eternal life, and threatens eternal death. We count her denunciations bugbears; and her prizes—what are they to us but so many meteors and rainbows, fair indeed to sight, but unsubstantial as the air whose magic builds them? The sons and daughters of the Heavenly Wisdom do not so. They believe her word. They submit to her authority. They follow her celestial guidance. We need not now recall the case of those elder brethren of the household, the elect angels, though they,

as it would seem, first set the example of such a justification of Wisdom by her children, as we now speak of. We have rather to do with the Divine administration as it affects the human race, and with the attitude which the wise among mankind hold towards it. It is here that the interest and moment of Christ's doctrine reach their climax for ourselves. Yet even within these limits an all but boundless field of observation spreads before us, and we can but mark its most important bearings and outlines.

If one thing be more certain than another, it is that there is a general plan of the Divine government of the world religiously and morally considered—Nature, Providence, and the Bible agree in affirming this—one which extends from the creation to the judgment, and embraces all peoples and nations; a plan most manifold, most various, and to mere human sense and reason most utterly perplexed and bewildering, viewed as the work of a Being who is infinitely wise. And time would fail to tell how human selfsufficiency and worldliness have dealt with this wonderful work of God—how they have denied it, how they have caricatured it, how they have scoffed at it, how accident, necessity, and capricious will have been juggled with to account for the mysteries of which it is the secret key. The children of Wisdom, even under the greatest religious disadvantage and obscurity, have always recognised God's righteous rule of the world; and this is notably the fact, where, as among ourselves, the great plan of it stands forth with exceptional affluence of revelation. Where others see nothing but darkness and labyrinth, the wise descry the handiwork of the Wisdom that never mistakes or falters; and where vision fails, they are still rational enough and devout enough to believe that the parent mind continues to operate, though the method may

escape them. The agency of the Evil Spirit, the unspeakable portent of heathendom, the providential election of grace, the gradual communication of truth to mankind, the infinite variety of spiritual privilege, the atoning death of the Son of God in the end of the world for the world's life, the Divine command to do the seeming impossibility of preaching the Gospel to every creature—all these and a thousand other inexplicable facts, they are fully persuaded, are not only reconcilable with the Wisdom of God but are expressions of that Wisdom; and they live and act precisely as if a far-reaching plan of the Divine government, including these facts, was ever seeking to accomplish its sublime purposes in the consummate glory of God, and in the highest good of his servants.

Again, within the more privileged circles of human life and experience, there are dispensations belonging to the conduct of this universal scheme of the Wisdom of God, which are open to approval or condemnation, according to men's religious character and the posture of their heart and will towards God. In particular, the methods, agents, and conditions of God's supreme grace to mankind are fitted to produce this twofold effect.

God has been pleased, for example, to make a Divine Book one of the most precious instruments which his Wisdom has ever used for the spiritual illumination and regeneration of mankind. Yet the first ages of the world had not a line of it. It was brought into being piecemeal. It is not yet two thousand years since it was completed. Even then for centuries it only came—it could only come—into few hands. At the present moment not a third part of the human race has ever heard of the existence of it. Moreover, the sacred original is not preserved to us in absolute faultlessness. The best translations are imper-

fect. And where we are surest of the text, the meaning is not always clear; sometimes it seems to be at issue with other contents of the holy volume, or with other revelations of the truth of God. Who does not see, that in all this, there is material for friendly or unfriendly judgment touching the Divine administration? As matter of fact, the Bible has always been the target at which worldliness and pride have directed their keenest shafts. And equally as matter of fact, the children of Wisdom have accepted it as inspired Scripture, have rejoiced in it as a treasure more to be esteemed than all jewels, and have proved it beyond question to be able to make men wise to everlasting salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

So of the human instruments, whom God employs in accomplishing his gracious will in the earth. These are often the very last which a purely natural sagacity would choose for the purpose. Moses is slow of speech; and he must go and argue the case of Israel with the Egyptian despot. A Philistine giant is to be got rid of: the task is committed to a youth armed with a sling and a stone. Learned and dignified hierarchs need rebuke from heaven: behold the voice of a hermit crying in a wilderness—"And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees"! Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Will a handful of fishermen storm the atheism, idolatry, and wickedness of the civilized world? By what possibility can men from the plough, the anvil, the loom, the shop, the desk, become mighty in the Scriptures, stand up without reason for fear in the place of the Christian teacher, perform the stupendous part of ambassadors from God to their fellow men, and feed the flock which He has redeemed with his own

blood? We know how human conceit and shortsightedness have regarded these Divine arrangements. Only the children of Wisdom comprehend how blessedly congruous it is to the perfection of God, and to the scope of His moral government, that the foolish things of the world should confound the things which the world counts wise, and the weak things of the world the things which pass as mighty, and how base things, and things despised, yes, even things that are not, should wield a supernatural force, before which the most potent things that are must fall and perish.

Furthermore, the terms and conditions upon which the highest gifts of God are offered to mankind belong to this same category of equivocal appearances, and no less surely test the relations which men hold towards the family of Wisdom and its head. "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?" A man, who came eating and drinking, a friend of publicans and sinners—do heaven and hell hinge upon acceptance or rejection of Him as the Redeemer of the world? If human nature must be bad, and if there must be a probation for eternity, why not allow an inborn germ of goodness to develop itself within us to the choking and extinction of the evil, that so we may be made ready for eternal life? Why might not processes of manly self-culture and discipline lift us up from the moral debasement of sin, and put the crown of a glorified manhood on our head? Why should not virtuous actions countervail the blame of vicious ones, or, at least, the temporary punitive purgations of another world prepare man for the bliss and sanctity of heaven? Such is the petulant language of human pride and self-esteem. What

is the Divine prescription? “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Thus the wisdom of God and the folly of man are hopelessly at issue over the conditions of human salvation; and it is only the truly wise of mankind who, despite the outcry of human ignorance and wilfulness, whether their own or others’, receive Christ with a contrite, grateful faith, to the saving of their souls, and so justify the Wisdom, whose children they are.

Once more, the children of Wisdom justify that part of the Divine procedure with men, which disposes individual lot, and determines individual privilege and duty. God has so constituted the world, that men often inherit evil from their forefathers. We may from our birth be physically or mentally disqualified for privilege, which is accessible to others. It may be so ordained, that we shall have little opportunity of becoming acquainted with the sublime verities of the Gospel. The religious lines may fall to us in places that are not pleasant. We may find it difficult to make our way into the light. There may be few about us, who will aid our efforts to do well. Temptation to evil may hem us in on every side. God’s hand may be heavy upon us in providential trial. We may be ignorant, poor, solitary. Now, all this, with one who is not of the household of Wisdom, will only beget mortification, anger, sullenness, if it does not lead on to scepticism, infidelity, and moral recklessness. The heart which recognises the authority of God’s infinite Wisdom—the very child of that Wisdom—will justify her doings by a humble submission to the Divine appoint-

ment, by a faithful use of the means of good at his command, and by a patient, practical looking for the ultimate rewards of righteousness. Such a one, in the sight of heaven and earth, so far from holding any quarrel with God, will be strong in faith, giving glory to his name. Whoever else may charge Him foolishly, he will justify Him by a reverent acceptance and fulfilment of His unexplained but wise and holy will. All the children of Wisdom, being truly her children, whatever their estate and circumstances, will thus justify the ways of God to men. And so, whether we contemplate the Divine dispensations on the largest or on the narrowest scale, whether in relation to mankind in general, or to the Church of Christ, or to individual life, under every view we find impressive verification of the doctrine taught by our Lord in the text.

Wisdom is justified of her children, justified of them all. This is the doctrine. Let it not be a doctrine merely. Let it turn, for every man, into a rule of life. The Divine Wisdom is dealing with us all in providence and redemption ; and we must either justify her works as the wise do, or we must take the side of the opponent, and condemn them. By vice, by worldliness, by self-worship we must publicly set to our seal that the moral government of the world is a mistake and a wrong ; or, on the other hand, by renunciation of ourselves, by consecration to Christ, by holy and serviceable living among men, by a gracious submission under trial to the will of our Heavenly Father, we must affirm our steadfast faith, that whether as respects ourselves or others, God does all things well, and that, the mysteries notwithstanding, his way is perfect. An alternative of conduct presents itself to every one of us ; and there is no escape from it. See that you

take the right course. Vindicate in your own person the Wisdom of Him whose thoughts are confessedly too high for human comprehension. Believe that clay, in God's hands, can open the eyes of the blind. Accept it as certain that the cross of holy service is nothing else but the crown of glory in disguise. Know it, and do not doubt, that God is able to give a good account of Himself, and that sooner or later the mists will all and finally roll off his dispensations. Do not spend life in asking vain questions, and in vainly endeavouring to answer them. God forbid that we should maintain a criminal and irrational conflict with Him, and so cast ourselves, amidst the lamentations of all wise and holy beings, whether in earth or heaven, into the moral waste-basket of the universe !

The children of Wisdom, whoever they may be, all justify her. Observe ! The household is one, but the members are not. They differ from each other. They may be as unlike as Moses and Aaron, as David and Jeremiah, as John the Baptist and Christ. It does not matter. So long as they are unworldly and humble, they belong to the family, and are fulfilling the will of its Divine Head. The differences are not an accident, still less are they a misfortune. They are as much matter of Divine ordination as the agreements. The end which God contemplates by his government of the world is large and manifold. Very various means and agents must be employed in order to secure it. It could not be overtaken by a uniform instrumentality. Let the children of Wisdom never lose sight of this. Other members of the family may not hold precisely the same theological opinions with ourselves. Some of them may differ widely from us in their views respecting ministerial orders and the proper

constitution of a Christian Church. Or, again, they may adopt what we deem questionable methods of doing God service, or may allow themselves personal habits and practices which our reading of the New Testament peremptorily forbids us to follow. Beware how you relegate to the company of the unwise, those who, though they do not think and act in all respects as you do, yet work righteousness, and walk humbly with God. Be quick to discern the lineaments of the celestial kinship under all its variations of guise and aspect. Truth is precious, unspeakably precious, every fibre of it. But so is charity. And so far as personal position before God is concerned, let us never forget St. Paul's teaching on the subject—without love truth is nothing. Would that the blessed spirit of charitable judging, of mutual forbearance, and of all generous and Christ-like sympathies were but more abundantly poured forth upon the Church of God! The world will never believe—is it too much to say that it ought not to believe?—until Wisdom is thus justified of her children.

Lastly, the Heavenly Wisdom is justified of her works in all her children. As, on the one hand, their dealings towards her are a willing homage done to her prerogatives, a setting forth in act of the praise of her truth and equity and goodness, so, on the other, her dealings with them have always illustrated, and will for ever continue to illustrate, to the joy of her household and the confusion of their adversaries, her own essential glory and perfection. Did not Wisdom justify herself in the case of the publicans and sinners, who, though condemned by self-righteous ecclesiastics, believed the word of the Baptist, and went into the kingdom of God? The woman, too, that had been a sinner—did not she obtain the like grace when, amidst the sanctimonious sneers of those same sons

of folly, the voice of the world's Saviour assured her that her sins were forgiven? And the first preachers of the Gospel, and their first converts, though their lives were counted madness, and though the cause they represented must have seemed to purely human eyesight foredestined to miscarry, with what emphasis of vindication has Wisdom justified her works in them! And so it is still. Men lose all things for Christ's sake, amidst the laughter of their generation; and they gain a hundredfold in wealth of spiritual blessing. And the labouring, suffering Church—often to its own amazement—finds impossibilities made possible before its eyes, and a nation is born to it in a day. But at present Wisdom works in a mystery, and her self-justification is but incomplete and partial. By and by it will be perfect, absolute, and final. For the individual child of the household, death and eternity will soon do what time shall leave unfinished. And in due season the coworking Spirit and Providence of God will effect the same glorious consummation for the entire fellowship of the sons of God. The season of the Church's toil and patience will not continue always. A time draws on when, the last Dagon being shattered on the threshold of his temple, the last false Bible torn to shreds and flung to the winds by its misguided readers, the last scorner's chair vacated for ever by its panic-stricken occupant, the Heavenly Wisdom shall gather all her children together in their Father's house, and in their supreme and ineffable felicity shall be surely, conspicuously, and everlastingly glorified in them. And of that last, best justification of Wisdom by her sons may we who hear Christ's Gospel be all counted worthy to partake, through the grace of Him, the only wise God our Saviour, to whom be honour and thanksgiving, world without end! Amen.

THE VOICE FROM THE HOLY MOUNT.

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him.”—
MATTHEW xvii. 5.

THE passage in our Lord's earthly life with which these words connect themselves, is regarded alike by believers in the Gospel and by unbelievers as a chief stone in the historic foundation of Christianity. And in this both parties are right. If the Transfiguration of Christ was a fiction, if it was even a dream, the ground is wholly cut away from under the miracles of the Bible, and we may dismiss them in mass as unworthy of credit. On the other hand, if the Transfiguration was a reality, as much a reality as the most unquestioned phenomenon belonging to the world of matter or of mind, if any conceivable absurdity is less absurd than that three such men as Peter, James, and John could either have invented or imagined the occurrence, then great consequences follow. The Old Testament is inspired; Judaism was a Divine institution; Christ was the Messiah; and the Gospel, with its glorious spiritual privileges and solemn obligations, is all and more than all that the Church of God accounts it to be.

Nor is this view of the evidential value of Christ's Transfiguration a modern one. The New Testament itself presents it. St. Peter, in his second Epistle, tells the Churches, that the apostles had not followed cunningly devised fables in preaching the future advent of the Lord, for that he

and some others of their number, “on the holy mount,” had seen Him arrayed in the very glory in which He would appear at the last day. The fact of his Transfiguration, in other words, was a historic certificate of the truth of the whole Christian system. And what is scarcely less significant—while we have four inspired records of the personal history of Christ among men, no fewer than three of the Evangelists narrate the Transfiguration in detail; the Holy Ghost thus challenging attention to the event as one of the most important of the things which He has caused to be written for our learning and salvation.

The circumstances of the Transfiguration are soon recited. Jesus and his disciples were on a missionary journey in the district of Cæsarea Philippi, among the spurs of Hermon. He spent his days there, as He was wont, in teaching and healing. At the close of one of them, He took his three favourite attendants, the elect of his elect, and went up into a mountain to pray. He did pray: and the disciples, exhausted by their labours, or else overcome by a supernatural influence which they could not resist, slept. They did not continue to sleep. Suddenly, as it would seem, but at least completely awaked—for so St. Luke writes, evidently with the design of precluding the thought, that what followed was a vision in sleep—they beheld their Master as before, and yet not as before, for the form of his countenance was altered and did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white and glistening as the light. Nor was He alone as before. Two glorious beings from the invisible world were present with Him, human beings from that world, men who had left the earth for centuries, but yet had never died; one of them, the illustrious leader and lawgiver of Israel, the other that vehement prophet, who had gone up to heaven with a

chariot and horses of fire. They were talking with Jesus, and the disciples heard the conversation. They heard, but did not speak. Awe and interest held them mute, till Moses and Elijah were seen to be withdrawing again into heaven. Then Peter's feeling found way in words—"Lord, it is good for us to be here : if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles ; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." He knew not what he said. He spoke in a rapture. And now a new object fixed his gaze, and that of his fellow-disciples. "A bright cloud overshadowed them : and behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him." Can we wonder that the apostles fell upon their faces sore afraid ? until recovering themselves, they looked around, and lo, they were alone with Jesus. Such is the simple, graphic story of the Transfiguration, as the writers of the Gospels tell it.

The meaning of the event, so far as it relates directly to Christ himself, must remain a secret. Let us not trespass upon that mysterious border ground, which lies between earth and heaven ; still less let us venture to pry into the ineffable fellowship, which, at this unique period of the bygone eternity, obtained between the incarnate Son of God and the Divine and for ever invisible Father, who delighted in Him. But the meaning for the apostles, for the Church of Christ throughout the ages, and for mankind at large—this is in a good degree ascertainable ; and it behoves us to determine and to mark it.

An important clue to the meaning is to be found in the circumstance, that every one of the Evangelists, who describe the Transfiguration, is particular to date its occurrence at exactly a week after certain great doctrinal conversations, which Jesus had held with his disciples on

their way through the Cæsarea region, conversations ending with a prophetic declaration on his part, that some of his hearers should not die till they had seen his royal glory. Remembering how St. Peter identifies the splendours of Christ's transfigured person with those of his second coming, we cannot doubt that the prediction had its fulfilment on Mount Hermon : and when we remark how closely the promise of this glorious manifestation is bound up with the instructions which Christ had just been giving, and how precisely the event in all its particulars was fitted to support these instructions, it becomes morally certain that the Transfiguration was providentially arranged for the purpose of reaffirming, corroborating, and enforcing the momentous truths, to which Christ had directed his disciples' thoughts. And if any question remains, it vanishes at once before the concluding scene of the apocalypse. A cloud overshadows them, and the words of One speaking are heard from it—"This is my beloved Son ; hear ye Him." Now we have the key in our hands. Just as the hurricane, and earthquake, and fire, which Elijah saw at Horeb, prepared the way for the still small voice which was to pierce the prophet's soul, just as the mighty thunderings of Sinai were God's majestic overture to that sacred, terrible law, designed to make it impressive for Israel of all generations, so in reverse order the descent of heaven upon the hill of Transfiguration was a Divine endorsement and commendation of all that Christ had taught, first for the apostles themselves, then for the world in general to the end of time. Hear the Son—this is the practical lesson from the holy mount, to which above every other it concerns mankind to give heed.

Christ is to be heard, in the first place, in the doctrine of his Divine Sonship and Mission. He had asked his

disciples what men said concerning Him, and they had answered Him according to the facts. Then He would have their own opinion. And Peter, in reply, speaking not his personal mind merely, but that of the other disciples also, had made his memorable confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." They did not comprehend the creed they held. It was to quicken their interest in it that Jesus proposed his question. And He now proceeded to set forth its supreme glory and momentousness. It transcended—He taught them—all human knowledge; man could neither discover it for himself, nor learn it from his fellow men. Acquaintance with it was an unspeakable distinction and blessedness. Yet it would not readily win the suffrages of mankind. On the contrary, it would be unpopular, and would provoke opposition. Earth and hell would combine to fight against it. But they should not prevail. The doctrine was the immovable foundation and irresistible strength of Christ's cause among men, and it should finally assert itself and be triumphant. No doubt all this would sink into the disciples' ears. But how would the impression be heightened, when, on the Mount of Transfiguration, they saw their Lord robed in the glory of Divinity, and heard the voice of the Father acknowledge Him, man though He was, as the very Son of God! And this voice, addressed to the three apostles, is God's word to the world.

The Living God is the Everlasting Father of a Divine Son, his Only-Begotten; so distinct from Him that He existed from the beginning in relation to God, "the brightness of his glory, the express image of his substance;" so one with Him in his essential nature that equally from the beginning He was God; partaker of the incommunicable attributes of God, the object of God's

infinite complacency, the Well-Beloved Son. This mysterious, adorable Person sustained from the birth of time the closest possible connection with the creatures. He was the firstborn of them all, in the sense that by Him they were all created—thrones, dominions, principalities, powers. In particular, He was the Maker of man, and the Author of all those marvellous qualities and capacities which constituted the image of God in him. Moreover, from the world's foundation He was the medium and channel of all Divine revelation to man. He walked in the garden with Adam ; He pointed his finger to the stars, and gave Abraham promise of descendants as numberless as they ; He went before the Church in the wilderness, and led it into Canaan ; He spake by the prophets of Israel ; He manifested the glory of the Invisible Throne to Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Whatever vision of God at any time came within range of human sense, it was Christ who lifted the veil. No man ever saw God : He who from eternity was in the bosom of the Father alone declared Him.

Finally, in the consummation of the eras, according to an eternal purpose of God, and as the issue of a long succession of Divine preparations and foreannouncements, the manifestation of God to man took a new and unexampled form, and in the person of Jesus Christ there was seen incarnate upon earth the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Here is the fundamental Christian dogma. God has a Divine Son ; and He has sent Him into the world in the likeness of our sinful flesh, as his representative and apostle to mankind. It is not a speculation. It is not a romance. It is a wondrous, overwhelming, and most blessed fact. And mankind everywhere are to hear Christ in his solemn and explicit declaration of it.

Christ is to be heard, again, in the doctrine of his Passion and Death. When He taught the mystery of his Divine Sonship and Apostolate, He spoke of truths which, in their great outlines at least, were familiar to the disciples, and as acceptable as familiar. They had learned them from the Old Testament. The Providence and Spirit of God had concurred to give these great verities a prominent place in the theology of Judaism. And as is well known, when the Lord was born, there was a widespread expectation throughout Israel of the appearance upon earth of the Apostle-Son of God. But Christ passed the bounds both of his disciples' knowledge and of their sympathy, by proceeding to show them, that his Messiahship laid Him under obligation to be a sufferer. "He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed." This was new doctrine to them. It was written plainly enough in their Scriptures; but they had not recognised it there: they had sunk it in other and more grateful views of the Redeemer. Now they were startled, they were shocked. Their love of their Master, not to say their love of themselves, rose in rebellion. The prophet greater than Moses, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, David's heir and lord—a fate such as this to overtake Him! We remember how Peter—once more representing his fellows—remonstrated with Jesus. We remember, also, with what withering rebuke Christ reaffirmed the obnoxious statement: "Behind me, Satan!"—from heaven to hell in an instant: Simon the blessed, but a moment ago; now Simon the Satan—"thou art a stumbling-block to Me; thou hast no heavenly perception, no spiritual instincts; thou mindest not the things of God, but those that be of men." It was a time for silence, and the disciples held

their peace. What, think you, must have been their amazement, some few days after, when, catching the conversation on the Mount, they heard Moses and Elijah talk with Jesus on the very subject on which they least supposed either the law or the prophets had anything to say—his Decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem! And the emphasis with which this part of Christ's teaching was commended to the apostles, belongs to it as it addresses itself to universal man.

Observe: the focal interest of the scenes of the Transfiguration gather about Christ in his character as a sufferer. Of all the subjects which might be expected, on such an occasion, to occupy the thoughts of Moses and Elijah—Christ's previous glory, his assumption of human nature, his future return to heaven, his everlasting reign at the right hand of God as the Mediator—none has any attraction in comparison with his approaching death at Jerusalem. And the words of the Father, and all the circumstances of the theophany point in the same direction. It is the suffering, dying Son, towards whom the eyes of heaven strain in unutterable awe and tenderness.

It is the more important to mark this, because of the complete antagonism which such a view of Christ's work on earth presents to a popular theory. According to the theory, there was in some sort a manifestation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ. It was the will of God that his Son, thus manifesting Him, should enter into conflict with the evil of the world. He did enter into conflict with it. He threw Himself into the thick of the conflict, not only denouncing sin, but what is far more difficult and dangerous, denouncing sinners, even those of the highest and most influential class, acting in every respect as the sworn and unchangeable enemy

of iniquity. What was the consequence? What could not but be the consequence, the theory inquires—the circumstances being what they were? He perished in the conflict. He came into contact with the burning wheel of human wickedness, and was caught and crushed by it. Very wonderful indeed was Christ's life. There is nothing wonderful in his death. His life being what it was, He must have died the death He did. His death was the necessary consequence of the action of unalterable law. And it has no further merit than as consummating that perfect self-sacrifice of his life, by virtue of which, under cover of a pantheistic mysticism past all grasp of the intelligence, mankind, it is affirmed, are without exception, and eternally brought back to God.

Contrast with this theory the view under which the Transfiguration exhibits the mystery of the Redeemer's career on earth. Here it is not the life, but the painful, ignominious exodus from life, which becomes all-significant. The paramount interest attaches to an event, which our theory makes a mere adjunct and inevitable sequence of the self-devoting life of Christ. Plainly at this point the modern theosophy and the representations of Inspired Scripture are in hopeless antagonism. And not at this point only, for the entire Volume of Revelation utters but a single voice on the subject in question. Everywhere the climax of its doctrine touching the Messiah is reached in his mortal suffering. God's Divine Apostle came into the world to preach religious truth with new breadth and distinctness. He came to reassert and give fresh ascendancy to the moral law, whether as written in the conscience of the Gentiles or in the Scriptures of the Jews. He came to establish a spiritual kingship over the intellect, the feeling, the will, the social and

political life of mankind, such as had never before existed or been thought of. He came, above all, to lay down His life for men's sins, and so to recover the world to God. Every candid reader of the Bible must allow—however he may explain the fact—that the death of Christ is the pivot on which the whole system of Scripture doctrine turns.

But the narrative of the Transfiguration has still more to say on the subject of Christ's death. A very remarkable expression, one so far as we know without parallel in the Sacred Volume, is used respecting it in St. Luke's account of the conversation which Moses and Elijah had with Jesus. "They appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which He was about to fulfil in Jerusalem." What is this? To fulfil is to fill full what before was not filled, to bring to completion a time, an action, a process, which was begun indeed, but was not yet finished. Thus the time of Christ's incarnation was fulfilled, when the period which, according to Old Testament prophecy, must elapse before its occurrence, had run its perfect length. So a prediction of ancient Scripture is fulfilled, when, having previously existed only as an inspired oracle upon the holy page, the course of events translates it into historic reality within the realm of Providence. In like manner, if Christ was to fulfil his death at Jerusalem, that death must have been a pre-existent, though imperfectly accomplished fact—indeed, as the nature of the case implies, the fact of all facts—in the economy of God's moral government of the world. And this is precisely the aspect under which both Testaments agree to represent it. When Christ died, He did but fulfil his death. This is the doctrine; and in the light of the Bible records it is abundantly intelligible.

The death of Christ—what but this was the matter and refrain of the preaching of the Baptist? “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Was it anything else, which the prophets saw and spoke of, when the brightest visions of God flashed upon their opened eyes, and when inspiration prompted their tongues to their Divinest utterances? “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with his stripes we are healed.” Such is the prehistoric history, which the chief of the prophets has sent down the ages. So, too, some of the most solemn institutions, ceremonials, and observances of the religious economy of Moses—as the Scriptures declare—and in particular the expiatory sacrifices common alike to Moses and the fathers, were simply Christ’s death enacted beforehand in Divinely-appointed type and emblem. It was upon the forensic basis of this same august transaction, an apostle assures us, that, between the historic limits of Eden and Calvary, God governed the world on the principle of “the pretermission of sins.” The death of Christ indeed was an event coeval with the world’s creation; it antedated that creation. “Before the foundation of the world”—St. Peter writes—Christ “was foreordained,” as God’s sacrificial lamb, to redeem mankind with his own costly blood. So that his actual death, when it occurred, was but the fulfilling of a death, which in Divine predestination, preparation, and spiritual efficacy, He had virtually died from the beginning of the dispensations of God towards the human race.

It is not too much to say, that if there be a Holy Ghost, and if the Scriptures are in any sense, that is a sense, his word, the keystone and pillar of God’s moral govern-

ment of the world are to be found in the fact, that in accordance with a Divine purpose formed before the world was, the incarnate Son of God, in the fulness of time, offered Himself on the altar of the cross as a propitiatory sacrifice for the world's sin, so manifesting, under the most affecting form possible, at once the infinite holiness and the infinite love of God, in the sight of all the creatures, and preparing the way, first for the spiritual regeneration of mankind, then for the establishment of the new heaven and earth, the final home of righteousness. Christ's exodus from life at Jerusalem with its wondrous preliminaries and sequences, the Divinely-appointed, vicarious death of the world's passover-lamb—the healing, as it was, of the moral breach between God and man; the end of the old things, the birthday of the new; the alpha and omega of the Divine economies; the peace and eternal salvation of all who believe; the rock of ages for the Church, the stone of stumbling for the adversary—no wonder Moses and Elijah could talk of nothing but this; no wonder Christ Himself told his disciples He must needs die at Jerusalem, and that the great Amen from the cloud bade all who have ears take heed to hear.

Further, Christ is to be heard in his announcement of the Terms and Conditions of the Gospel Salvation.

In the person of Peter, as we have seen, Jesus rebuked that human, self-sparing view of religious duty, which the disciples' spokesman had expressed. It was only by mortal pain, He taught them, that He could accomplish the will of God. It was not to be accomplished at any smaller cost. And he was a Satan, who said, Spare Thyself! But in speaking thus, Christ not only reiterated the ungrateful doctrine of his cross; He opened the door

to another doctrine, the counterpart and supplement of it, the doctrine of his disciples' cross. If his Divine kingdom was to be set up in the world, He must be content to suffer; and if they would share in the glory of it, they must suffer likewise. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." And with the blaze of the Transfiguration about them, the disciples would understand, what we also, if we would walk in their steps, must not fail to observe, that this personal, practical element of the Lord's teaching is as true and as authoritative as any other part of his supernatural doctrine.

Do we say, Blessed are they who, by virtue of Christ's atonement, may be just with God though they have sinned, who may be made holy though by nature and life they are impure, who may secure an eternal heaven notwithstanding that in law and strict justice heaven is forfeit? Yes, it is even so. Still, there must needs be the cross-bearing.

The benefits of the Redemption, great as they are, are conferred in harmony with the moral constitution and circumstances of mankind. It is not conceivable that they should be bestowed on any other plan. God being what He is, and man what he is, the redemptive economy must of necessity leave inviolate the freedom of the human will. Were it otherwise, the moral restitution of our nature, which is the ultimate scope of redemption, would be wholly missed. As matter of fact, the cross of Christ leaves man's will inviolate; and it is this which creates that other cross, the cross which every believer in Him must carry, if he will inherit eternal life.

The will of man, in its natural action and bias—who is ignorant of the fact?—directly contravenes the will of

God. We will the fleshly, the earthly, the visible, the fleeting. God wills for us the spiritual, the divine, the unseen, the everlasting. Immediate gratification—that is our will. Sacrifice of the present for the sake of the future—that is God's will. Spare thyself, is the voice of human nature all the earth over. Deny thyself, is everywhere and always the word of God to man. Hence if any will do God's will, as Christ did, it is manifest he must imitate Christ by renouncing his own will. And this is our cross.

Very simple and gracious are the terms of the evangelical salvation—repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. But they necessitate self-crucifixion. The unholy dreamer must cast off the works of darkness. The intemperate must fling the cup of madness from his lips. Demas must cease to love this present world. And the Pharisee, whether he be infidel or nominally Christian, must fain become even as that publican. With all the grace of the Gospel, straight is the gate by which men enter into the enjoyment of its spiritual blessings and prerogatives.

And so of every after step in the way to heaven. Fellowship with God, dominion over self, superiority to temptation, patience in trouble, diligence in well-doing—none of these can either be secured or maintained except on the principle of an absolute surrender of our own blind, foolish, evil will, and a cheerful acceptance in its place of the good and perfect will of God.

Last of all, Christ is to be heard in his exhibition of the Solemn and Blessed Sanctions of Discipleship to Him. We dare not speak of any sanctions, strictly so called, under which Christ fulfilled the task of his personal ministry to mankind. He was indeed, by reason of his manhood, mysteriously accessible to temptation from the

Wicked One ; and his language to Peter just before the Transfiguration suggests, that even a human being might, consciously or unconsciously, act the part of Satan, and roughen for Him the way of obedience to his Heavenly Father's will. Still it was not possible for Christ to miscarry. The union in Him of absolute Godhead with perfect humanity, involving as it did the unmeasured supply of the Divine Spirit to meet the exigencies of his sinless soul, forbids the conception of the Redeemer's failure. And his voluntary subjection of Himself to the conditions of "a servant" brought Him under no liability to pains and penalties for unfaithfulness. On the other hand it would be an abuse of language to speak of Christ's work as accomplished under a sanction of personal recompense, though here it is impossible to run the logical line between glory and glory. The salvation which Christ was to win for mankind by his cross, is for ever bound up with his own mediatorial triumph and reign : and the two cannot be sundered ; the Scriptures blend them beyond the possibility of distinction. But there was an ineffable exaltation and felicity, which the Father had prepared for Him as the issue of his redemptive undertaking. All along his course of self-abasement and suffering on earth, this issue was before his eyes, and repeatedly comes into view in the New Testament as the object of our Lord's desire and prayer. "For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame." "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." So likewise in his discourse with the disciples on the occasion of the text. He was to suffer and die—He told them ; but He was to be "raised again the third day." The cross would not be the terminus of his career. He would go

down into the grave, but it would be to abolish death ; and the momentary obscuration of his glory as the Son of God with power would be followed speedily by his everlasting royalty in the heavenly places as Lord of all. "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." The apostles' sorrow, in hearing of the humiliation which awaited their Master, seems for the time to have completely swallowed up the gladness, which communications like these were fitted to inspire. But there were other communications of a kindred nature affecting themselves, which they could not overlook—"If any man chooses to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever shall choose to save himself, shall lose himself ; and whosoever shall lose himself for my sake, shall find himself. For what shall a man be profited, if he gain the whole world, and pay himself as the penalty ? Or what shall a man give in exchange for himself ? For the Son of Man will come ere long in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then will He render to every one according to his doing." In other words, Christ would have his disciples understand, that while the most glorious consequences for Himself, as well as for mankind, would result from his abjuring his own will in favour of that of his Father, tremendous issues likewise hung upon their personal consent or refusal, upon the consent or refusal of all to whom his Gospel should come, to tread in his steps. Whatever else the witnesses of the Transfiguration forgot, when they heard the charge from heaven, they would scarcely forget this last most weighty and yet most joyful instruction of their Master. Neither let any who hear the Divine voice through the echoes of the centuries forget it.

The Gospel of Christ proposes to mankind an alternative of moral choice. They may do their own will, or they may do the will of God. But the decision which they make is not matter of indifference. In the nature of things it cannot be. So far from this, it connects itself indissolubly with the most august and solemn sanctions.

No natural compulsion is laid upon us to do the will of God. If we please, we may decline to do that will; we may refuse to do it. It is the awful prerogative of man's moral freedom to lift up its right hand in the face of heaven and earth, and to say, O God, I will not do thy will. It may be our pleasure to do our own will. We may deliberately shut God out of our thoughts. We may eschew whatever burdens of self-denial and self-sacrifice the Christian profession might impose upon us. We may turn religion over to weaklings and idiots. We may be money-loving, gay, vicious. In a word we may do precisely as our own inclination and humour dictate. And God will not interfere. No lightning-flash from the sky will consume us. No spectre-voice of protest, causing our blood to chill, will speak out of the darkness. On the contrary, it may go well with us. We may walk in the sunshine. We may compass all our ends. We may gain the entire world of our aspiration and desire. Only this is not the whole of the case. There is a sanction belonging to the choice which we have made. Christ tells us so. "Whosoever shall elect to save himself, shall lose himself." This is the hitherto unreckoned element. Eternal law demands, that he who chooses his own will as against the will of God shall do it at the cost of himself. He shall lose himself—is Christ's very word. All the good that he was made for, all the beatitude and dignity of which his life on the earth was capable, all the glorious potentialities

of his immortal being, the very substance and soul of his God-sprung, God-destined self—he shall lose them. In this world there shall be forfeiture of the knowledge of God, of the smile of God, of the likeness of God, of the service of God, of the fellowship of the people of God, of the hope of eternal life with God. By and by, when Christ shall appear in the last day, the forfeiture shall be consummated, and beyond all possibility of appeal, the sentence of his Divine lips shall adjudge the doer of his own evil will to the absolute, conscious, punitive, and everlasting loss of himself. On the other hand, if the grace of God enable us to make the holy choice,—“Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God” !—and so, in the other and good sense of the term, to lose ourselves, we may suffer loss of property, loss of friends, loss of health, loss of freedom, loss of life : and we must of necessity forego and sacrifice much, which our natural will would affect and cherish. But side by side with all this there is an eternal sanction, which we must be careful to note. “Whosoever shall elect to lose himself, shall save himself.” So Christ speaks. His meaning, it is not for human language to interpret. Experience alone prolonged into eternity can estimate the gain secured by those who, renouncing the world, for ever and ever save their own selves. The knowledge of God—man’s highest wisdom ; the favour of God—man’s supreme blessedness ; the image of God—man’s most glorious dignity ; the work of God—man’s loftiest vocation ; the communion of saints in the household of God—man’s social felicity in its purest and intensest form ; the good hope of the eternal vision of God—man’s truest consolation and sublimest prospect : this is, to them, the hundredfold gain of the life that now is. And yet a little while, the disabilities and evils of time having vanished away for ever,

the servants of Christ shall find themselves in the celestial dwelling of the blessed, where Moses and Elijah are ; and again a little while, and the Lord shall appear in the final manifestation of his kingdom, and those same Divine lips, which speak the everlasting condemnation of the evil-doers, shall render "glory, and honour, and immortality" to all the workers of righteousness. Thus in the perfect beatitude of God's deathless being, past all peril of lapse or forfeiture, the doer of the will of God as against his own will shall overtake the design of his creation, shall become possessor of all the good of which his divine endowments render him capable, and world without end shall rejoice in the absolute, conscious, and most blissful gain of the very substance and self of his redeemed and glorified manhood.

Christ is to be heard—such is the practical, catholic instruction of the holy mount—heard in his doctrine respecting the great verities, which have now passed in succession before us. "Hear Him"! So the voice from the excellent glory spoke to the sense of the apostles. So it has repeated itself through the inspired records, the living ministry, and the inward teaching of the Spirit of God down all the ages of the Church's life. So that same voice in these last days speaks to all who hear the Gospel, speaks to ourselves. And how we ought to hear Christ is sufficiently obvious, when we reflect upon his personal character, upon the relations in which we and all mankind stand to Him, and upon the grandeur and importance of the doctrines which form the subject of his preaching. Hear Him with absolute confidence. He is not a man, that He should lie or be in error. He is the eternal Word, the personal counterpart of the Divine intelligence, the very truth of God. Hear Him with reverent earnestness.

He speaks, because great interests are at stake. Sin, salvation, eternal life and death—these are his topics. Hear Him with practical submission. He cannot be imposed upon. Our hosannas will be execrations in his ears, if we do not the things that He said. Hear Him promptly and without delay, for his communications relate to the present; they admit of no postponing; and the loss of an hour may make the difference to us of the final loss or gain of ourselves. Remember, He deserves to be heard; He claims to be heard; He has a right to be heard; sooner or later—let us never lose sight of it—He will be heard. Now his voice comes to each one of us from the place of the mercy seat—"Follow thou Me"! But it is optional with us, whether we give heed to him or no. A day is at hand—He forewarns us of it here—when He will speak from the judgment-throne. And if then He shall say to any man "Depart"! there will be no room for an alternative. Christ must then be heard; and no reclaim of the will can avail to bar our reluctant but swift, complete, and everlasting obedience.

Therefore let all ears make haste to hear the Son. And if we do already hear Him, let us listen henceforth with a quicker intelligence, a devouter sympathy, and a more loving and practical obedience. Nor let us cease to listen, until by and by, or ever we are aware of it, the form of his countenance, no longer that which faith sees in the mirror, is transfigured to our gaze, and shines as the sun, and we ourselves escaped for ever from the travail and disquiet of the weary earth beneath us, find our blessed home in God's holy habitation, and go no more out.

THE WAY TO THE FATHER.

“No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.”—JOHN xiv. 6.

WE hear much at present of the fatherhood of God. And we cannot hear too much, provided the doctrine be truly stated. God is our Father, the Father of all men. He made us all; provides for us all; loves us all; loves us with a love such as sentimental religion never dreamt of, when its dreams were gayest. He would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. And this is not a new doctrine. Heathenism, ancient and modern, has held with more or less explicitness the dogma of the Divine paternity. If it is not a marked feature of the Jewish Scriptures, it is at least a distinct presence in them. While for the New Testament and the Gospel, there is scarcely a truth which enters more vitally and persuasively into their substance, which is more really part of their very kernel and marrow, than this sublime and most blessed doctrine that God is the Father of mankind. Only they are peculiar in explaining, what Heathenism never knew, what the Law and the Prophets only taught vaguely and imperfectly, our Father in the Eternal Son of God, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

This distinctively Christian doctrine is assumed and declared by Christ in the text, and it is presented under views which, while they are important for all times, are

exceptionally apposite to our own, and claim a devout and earnest attention from every one of us.

I.

The form of the passage is polemical. It presumes, that is to say, an opponent ; if not a personal one, at least doctrine, with which it disagrees and is at issue. It protests with emphasis against certain religious teachings and practices, actual or possible, which contravene and deny it. And we should do injustice to Christ's meaning if we did not consider the text, in the first place, under this controversial aspect. No man, whatever may be affirmed or essayed to the contrary, cometh to God, the Father of all, except through Jesus Christ.

The words were directly addressed to the apostles, and were intended to guide their personal belief and conduct. But we cannot read the foregoing chapters of the Gospel without feeling that they have, and were designed to have, a much wider application, and that Christ here simply preaches to willing ears doctrine which He had taught to unwilling ones all through his public ministry.

Throughout that ministry He was in conflict with men, who held the doctrine of the fatherhood of God, but not the true doctrine. Again and again He encountered a school of religionists, who, if they did not formally abjure the Scripture Revelation, yet sublimed it away, reducing sin to a peccadillo, denying the world to come, or else stripping it of its terrors, and so representing God as though He looked upon his human offspring, at least upon that portion of it forming in their estimation the sum of mankind, with a complacency which winked at all moral distinctions. In fact the Supreme Father looked upon all

with equal indifference ; all had right and power of free communication with Him at their pleasure ; and in the future life, if there was a future life, all would attain to sure beatitude in God.

In opposition to this theory, Christ taught that, child of God as man was, he was estranged from God through sin. He had lost the knowledge of God, and was spiritually dark. He had lost the favour of God, and was spiritually guilty. He had lost the image of God, and was spiritually corrupt. He had lost the life of God, and was dead in trespasses and sins. Moreover, that there was no remedy in the natural relations subsisting between God and the creature, and that men could only come to God, and secure the prerogatives of sonship by intervention from without. In other words, as against the doctrine of salvation by natural right and competence, Christ preached salvation by grace and by external help through a Divinely appointed Mediatorship. And this is the immutable witness of the Gospel through the ages.

There are those among ourselves who, with certain modifications, teach the old doctrines of a philosophical Sadduceeism. Is not God the Father of men ? Are we not all his children—foolish and wayward possibly, but still his children ? Who shall separate us from the love of God ? Let us assure our hearts before Him. Let us look Him in the face with an unflinching eye. Let us not doubt but that sooner or later He will teach us the lessons of a perfect self-knowledge and self-correction, and so will gather us in for ever to his home and bosom.

Christianity challenges this doctrine. Appealing to Christ's credentials as a teacher sent from God, it proclaims to the world on his behalf, that God hath *given* to men eternal life, and that this life is by a Mediator whom

He hath ordained. The Gospel does not argue the doctrine of the mediatorship so much as testify it. Not that it does not admit of argument. There is no absurdity in the doctrine. Why may not God, in the exercise of his moral government of the creatures, be Himself approached by mediation, just as under his providential government a being that is naturally or morally higher may be so approached by one that is naturally or morally lower? Who but God is competent to determine how we may most fitly come to Him? And as the mediatorship is actually constituted, what lessons touching the Divine holiness and love on the one hand, touching the ruin and helplessness, the dignity and sublime vocation of man on the other, does it not pour into our ears and into those of the wondering universe! The doctrine, however, transcends argument. It is matter of supernatural witness. And in face of all deistical reasoning and sentiment to the contrary, Christ's Gospel maintains, that no man cometh to God, the Father of heaven and earth, otherwise than by a Divinely prescribed mediatorship.

But Christ's ministry did battle even more keenly with another school of misbelievers in the fatherhood of God. The men whom He resisted unto blood, striving against their evildoing in doctrine and life, were men who held that God was their Father through mediatorship. Angels, Abraham, Moses, saintly pedigree, holy observances, meritorious fasting and almsdeeds—these were their mouth-piece with God, their steppingstones to immortality.

Christ told them, they carried a lie in their right hand. The props on which they depended were unreal, or they were inadequate. While they were right in believing that man could only find God through mediætion, there was in fact—so He taught—but one Mediator between God and

men, even Himself, the eternal and then incarnate Son of God. And this also is the abiding witness of God in the Gospel.

Alas ! we have the doctrine of the Pharisees among us as well as that of the Sadducees. Men are heard proclaiming, that the prayer of a disembodied saint, or the benediction of a consecrated fellowman, or the magic of a Christian rite, or a self-inflicted mortification of the flesh, has the stupendous power to join earth and heaven together, setting guilty souls at one with God again, ridding the human heart by some inexplicable process of its moral pollutions and diseases, and furnishing men with a sure passport to eternal life.

The New Testament pronounces all this to be a delusion and a falsehood. Our almsdeeds, our fastings, our bowings at the sacred name, our frequent communions, the baptismal waters, the intercessions of the dead or living, the absolutions of a priesthood—these bridge the gulf between us and God ! What does a man think of himself, what does he think of God, who takes up with such a hypothesis ? Christ alone is the Mediator. There is absolutely no other. All besides, personal or impersonal, are pretenders to a virtue which they do not possess. They are false, or weak, or superannuated, and if men hear Christ, they will disavow and reject them.

II.

But the Lord's language is not controversial only. Taken with its context, it becomes the summary and index of a most large and precious Scripture teaching as to the nature of that mediatorship of Christ, through which men come to God. It calls our attention to the

answer which the Gospel makes to the question—How do men come to the Father through Christ?

In the necessity of things, the person, character, and history of the Mediator will have much to do with the nature and method of his mediation. And on these points we have affluent light. Who the Mediator was, let St. John tell us. "In the beginning existed the Word, and the Word existed in relation to God, and the Word existed (being) God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us." This was the Mediator. And his character and history—how He was holy, harmless, separate from sinners; how He bore our sicknesses and carried our sorrows, how He spake words of truth and power, such as the world had never heard before, has never heard since; how He wrought Divine miracles of healing and blessing; how in the perpetration of a crime which might almost sadden eternity He was put to death by the hands of wicked men; how He rose again from the dead, and amidst gazing human eyes went up through the clouds into heaven—all this we know on the credit of testimony which bears every conceivable token of trustworthiness.

With these facts in view, men have held, that the value of Christ's mediation consists in the energy of the truth which He taught, and in the force of his moral example. The thoughtless, self-pleasing, prodigal children of God here upon earth, arrested by the awful charm of Christ's doctrine, and spellbound by the fascination of his pure and lovely character, return to their Father, and are brought into everlasting agreement with his holy will.

Others, rising higher than this, explain that the Eternal Son of Man, by his perfect fulfilment through his earthly life of the will of God as our representative, became so

acceptable to God, that by reason of what He was and did God is now the loving Father of us all, and in Him all men virtually are already, and by and by will actually be for ever, justified, and sanctified, and glorified.

Now both these theories of Christ's mediation, the ethical and the mystical, as they may be called—and subject to slight variations of statement they are the two prevailing theories of our time, not being the true one—whatever their merits or demerits, ignore, if they do not expressly deny, the most positive and repeated declarations of Christ Himself, and of the New Testament Scriptures on this subject. Judged by the testimony of these witnesses—and surely they are the only ones that have any authority to speak—the theories in question mistake the entire basis, method, and scope of the mediatorship of Christ, which, while it is most truly ethical, and within certain limits perhaps mystical also, is essentially, in all its grounds, processes, bearings, and issues, an economy of holy law—an economy, that is to say, in which God and man sustain towards each other not simply the tender relations of father and son, but those larger, loftier, more august, and absolutely unique relations of the Moral Governor of the universe, on the one hand, and of the rational and responsible creature on the other.

If we will hear the Scriptures, the whole human race has apostatized from God through the wiles of the Devil. Under altered circumstances mankind in their generations have repeated the original transgression, and are gone astray from God like lost sheep. By personal sin we have incurred the Divine displeasure—a displeasure from which we have no power to relieve ourselves. Indeed by reason of our moral corruption we are as indisposed as we are unable to do the will of God. We are children of wrath, liable to

the everlasting loss of ourselves. But, so the Scriptures teach, by Christ as the Mediator provision is made for the establishing again of the relations which at first bound us to God. He, the Eternal Son of God, by the grace of the Father sent upon the earth in the likeness of our sinful flesh, partaker at once of the nature of sinning man, and of the nature of Him against whom man had sinned, freely of his love to us delivered Himself as an oblation to God for the world's sin, being "lifted up" between heaven and earth—such is his own word in the connection of the text—the just for the unjust, on the altar of his cross, so making atonement for human transgression, propitiating the righteous anger of God towards sinners, and securing for the whole world, under condition of faith in Him as its Saviour, a gracious right to all the vast, various, and immortal privileges of our original sonship to God.

More particularly, according to the doctrine of Christ and his disciples, men come unto God, entering into filial relation to Him, and enjoying the perfect benefit of that relation, through Christ's mediation, inasmuch as :

In the first place—the costly blood of Christ has made satisfaction in law to Divine justice for the sins of all mankind. Apart from Christ's offering the world was guilty before God. By virtue of that offering its guilt is expiated, and all men, through a personal faith in his merits, may find mercy and acceptance with God unto life eternal.

Secondly—as the purchase and recompense of the Redeemer's passion, God gives to the world by Christ's hands, in his character of intercessor for men, his own Holy Spirit, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God." By his gracious operations the way is prepared for Christ's doctrine; moral obstacles to faith are weakened and

struck down ; assurance of pardon is given to believers ; and the human soul, recovered by a second birth to its primeval righteousness, shines once more in the image of Him who created it.

Last of all—under the reign of Christ, exalted to God's right hand as lord of heaven and earth, believers in Him are protected from the evil that is in the world ; are subjected to a providential discipline, designed to rest, develop, and mature the graces of their regeneration ; and through all the hazard and difficulty of their probationary being are furnished with strength, enabling them to do the will of God and to make their way to everlasting life.

And so—the Gospel being witness—by the death of Christ as our reconciliation with God, by the Spirit of Christ as the restorer of our moral likeness to God, and by the mediatorial kingship of Christ as the eternal conqueror of sin and death, men come unto the Father through Him.

III.

But our Lord's language, while it is controversial and doctrinal, is likewise evangelical and promissory. Men can only come to God through Christ. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." But by this name, "the name which is above every name," there is free access to God for every soul of mankind.

"To come unto the Father" is to know God.

It is easy to comprehend, how a finite intelligence, created in the image of God, might have power to acquaint itself with the Divine perfections and character, and so might drink eternally, with ever deepening satisfaction, of the inexhaustible fountain of the wisdom and

knowledge of God. But how shall the intelligence of man, blighted and debased by sin, attain to this beatitude? Will instruction, will reasoning, will contemplation, reveal God to me? Where is the teacher or the method, whereby I may find Him? By Christ we may come unto the Father. He is the way of truth. "No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son shall reveal Him." But such a one shall have the knowledge. You ask me how. I cannot tell you how. But so it is. What science, philosophy, intuition, can never do, the doctrine of Christ, made quick and powerful by his Spirit, accomplishes for all those who obey Him. They know God.

Again—" *To come unto the Father* " is to be the object of the love of God. For beings like ourselves, not only ignorant of God through the blindness of our heart, but guilty before Him by reason of transgression, and morally impotent through the tyranny of evil in us, the question of questions, if our eyes are opened, will be that of the possibility of forgiveness and spiritual restitution. Our sense of danger and our conviction of duty will alike prompt this momentous inquiry. Will God be merciful to me a sinner? Will He lift up his countenance upon me, and in pity rescue me from the misery, degradation, defilement, and final consequences of my sin? Or will He for ever thrust me away from his presence, and refuse me any standing-place before Him? By Christ we may come unto the Father; for He is the way of life. Separate from the redemption God's wrath is upon us, and we abide in judicial and moral death. "But he that hath the Son hath life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." This is the glorious Gospel of the blessed God for all men

and for all time. Christ's blood is our ransom. He has purchased salvation for us. If we confess our sins—for his sake "God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What no man can claim as a right, what no man can earn as a recompense, what no man can achieve for himself by any adroitness or audacity of self-help, Christ by his cross and Spirit bestows on all those who receive Him. He secures for them the Father's grace. He sends forth from the Father the Spirit of adoption into their hearts. He by the same Spirit, the Spirit of life which is in Him, sets them free from the law of sin and death. We come unto God by Him, and are made the sons of God by faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Once more—" *To come unto the Father* " is to be with God for ever.

Man is not only dark and guilty and impure before God; he is a subject of moral probation and is destined to immortality: and for a being so circumstanced it is not enough that he have spiritual light and life, if he is truly and properly to attain to God. I may have learned of Christ, and may know the Father. I may be reconciled to God through the death of his Son, and may rejoice in the consolation. The regenerating Spirit may have made all things new in me, and I may walk in the Divine commandments blameless. But I may be sensible—shall be sensible—notwithstanding, of continued liability to sin. I may find myself—shall find myself—surrounded by influences unfriendly to godliness. Duties may be imposed upon me—will be imposed—by the providence of God, which cannot but subject my faith and loyalty to pressure. And the question will arise—sometimes it will force itself upon us with unutterable urgency—Is it pos-

sible, being what we are, and circumstanced as we are, in the truest, fullest, and most blessed sense of the term, beyond all hazard, that is, of future lapse and mis-carriage, to come unto God? Can my sinful nature be so completely renovated, that I shall serve God with a perfect devotion? Can this self-pleasing will be so chastised and disciplined, that it shall bow in absolute submission to the holy will of God? Can I so successfully resist the world and the Evil One, so stedfastly fulfil the tasks appointed me by God, as by and by to be found of Him in peace, and in the uttermost dimension of the grace to come unto the Father of spirits and live? Is this possible? Again we have the answer in the doctrine of the text. Christ is the everlasting life of all who come unto God by Him. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Christ "is the true God and eternal life." His priestly intercession and royal authority guarantee to his people whatever illumination, comfort, strength, or guidance they may need in order to their perfecting; and it is our Father's good pleasure, that through and with Christ we should finally enter into the joy of our Lord. Energy of will, strength of purpose, resolution, constancy, fortitude, self-respect, enthusiasm—all will fail us. But Christ's grace will keep us from falling, and will present us faultless before the Father with exceeding joy. Let us but commit ourselves in reverent subjection to Him as the Mediator—hearing his word, welcoming his cross, treading in his footsteps, looking for his coming again—He will kill our sinfulness; He will paralyse our enemies; He will gird our weakness with omnipotence; He will go before us in the way we should take; He will cast his blessed arms about us when the heart and flesh fail; He will guide our feet up the golden stairs that lead to

immortality; He will bring us to God. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Do you hope by and by—a feeble, erring, sinful man—to come unto God, even the Father? So to come to Him, as to see Him without embarrassment, to know Him without error, to rejoice in Him without misgiving, to resemble Him without flaw, to worship Him without weariness, to glorify Him without failure, to live with Him, nay, to live in Him, in perfect fruition and bliss, without end of life? You hope for that—good which transcends all human understanding and thought! It is your very vocation in the Gospel. This, and nothing less, is the sublime calling, wherewith God hath called his redeemed family of man through his well-beloved Son our Saviour.

The meaning of a Scripture like the text disdains exposition. At best, we can but skirt the borders of the meaning of it. And even here there must be much which will for ever distance and escape us.

The words illuminate the widest possible area of religious truth and contemplation. God does not hold those direct relations to the creatures, which a fashionable philosophy assumes as an axiom of its teaching. He is and always has been, whether as creator, preserver, or redeemer, the Father of men through a Mediator. The Divine perfections must not be resolved into a colourless unity of beneficence. The creatures are not at liberty to crowd the steps of God's throne irrespective of their

moral condition and attitude before Him. God is angry with the wicked every day, and He only forgives human sin through the satisfaction of his Son. Many of the mysteries belonging to the successive dispensations of religion among men become intelligible, when it is understood that mediation is a fundamental principle of God's moral government of the world. Here the transcendent excellence of the Gospel, as compared with all foregoing economies of the grace of God to man, notably with the economy of Moses, reveals itself. And here, too, we comprehend at once the cause and the cure of the spiritual ignorance and misery, which oppress the hitherto unevangelised nations of mankind.

Within a narrower circle, Christ's doctrine lays down broad lines of duty and privilege for the Church of God. It bids it beware lest it make the way to the Father either wider or scantier than the Divine ordination has appointed. Men can only come to God through the Mediator. Let no false charity, on the part of the Church, presume to enlarge what God has straitened. Through the Mediator men may come to God without let or hindrance. It is at the Church's peril, that it dares to cripple their evangelical liberty. So the text is a standing instruction to the Church from its adorable Head. At the same time the passage carries with it promise of unlimited blessings for the Church, both within its own consecrated area, and in its missionary service for mankind, so long as it does honour to the name of names—that name, apart from which Christianity, however dignified her aspect or fair her attire, wields no powers of the world to come, and brings no message of salvation to man's lost spirit.

Finally—the text speaks with a gracious but authoritative voice to every hearer of the Gospel. What does it say?

Do not hope to find God without Christ. You cannot. God will not allow it. Apart from Christ the intelligence misses God : much more do the heart and soul. A purely natural science cannot even discover the God who rules in its own domain. What is the God of the modern intuitionist and experimental philosophy? An abstraction, an idealisation, a delirious juggle between the personal subject and the impersonal object of human thought, a personification of the forces of nature, at best a Somewhat, whose sole moral perfection—if it can be called moral—is an infinite good-nature. Assuredly this is not the God either of nature or providence. The God of nature clothes the world with beauty, and shatters it with earthquake. The God of providence fills the mouths of the creatures with plenteousness, and sends forth sword and famine to lay waste and to destroy. A very different Being indeed from the quasi-scientific Divinity ! And am I to be sent to this vaporous fiction with my spiritual darkness, my guilty conscience, my sin-trampled will, my dreadful foreboding of wrath to come ? I do not want such a God. My need and misery shall not be mocked by an illusion so palpably the offspring of unbelief and falsehood. The God I want must be a holy God as well as a gracious. He must hate evil, while He delights in righteousness. He must be terrible in his doings, at the same time that He is full of compassion, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin. And in Christ I find him, and in Christ alone. History, literature, man, the universe—I scan them all in vain. Christ reveals to me the same God, whom nature and providence tell of, only with fuller illustration, and under more august and kindly aspects. And what is still better—He atones for my sin ; He staunches the fountain of my unhappiness ; He sets me free from the jurisdiction

of spiritual evil ; He carries me safely—it may be through great tribulation—into God's everlasting joy. Therefore let no man delude his fellow, let none delude himself, as though God were accessible through other channels than the one which He has sanctioned and ordained.

What is the word of the text ?

Do not treat Christ as if his Mediatorship was wanting and inadequate. As with his person, so with his work and offices : they are all perfect. He has delivered the whole counsel of God. The doctrines of men, which make a woman sinless, or a priest infallible, are not only no addition to the truth ; they are a trespass upon Christ's authority as the Incarnate Word of God, and are to be thrust away with abhorrence as impertinent and profane. The blood of Christ is the one, sufficient, and final atonement for sin. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. It was offered once for all, and will never be repeated. And whoever of our guilty race receives it by a true and living faith becomes thereby a child of God and an heir of the kingdom of heaven. Masses, confessions, absolutions, invocations of saints—they are a blasphemous denial of the perfectness of the sacrifice and priesthood of Christ, and a cruel invasion of the rights which God has conferred upon mankind in Him. So of the grace through which the human soul, under the Gospel, is made free from the power of evil, and fitted for the everlasting vision of God. This is the exclusive work of Christ's Spirit. None but He can cleanse and sanctify our fallen nature. He alone can keep us unsoiled from the world, and present us without blame before the throne of God. Penances cannot do this ; pilgrimages cannot ; purgatorial fires cannot. God be merciful to the men who, by these inventions, even ignorantly dash the fair face of God's lovingkindness

towards us, and roughen for weary souls the way of salvation, made plain by his love! Christ is a perfect Mediator. And if we will enjoy the benefit of his interference on our behalf, He alone must be to us “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

How does the text speak?

Blessed art thou, O man, whoever thou art, who hast this Gospel preached to thee. If thou art dark, because thou canst not see God; or miserable, because thy conscience tells thee God is angry; or wellnigh worn out by the fruitless struggle with sin; or ready to wish thou hadst never been born, because the joy of life is all killed through the dread anticipation of the world to come—it is thine own fault, if it be thus with thee. It might be very much otherwise. There is but a step between thee and God. The knowledge of God, the peace of God, the image of God, the everlasting heaven of God—all are within thy reach. Consider it. Christ is the light of the world kindled for thee. The moral demands of God upon thee are all satisfied by his meritorious passion. His Spirit, given to all who believe Him, is more than master of human depravity. He, seated for ever at God's right hand in the heavens, this very hour does battle on thy behalf with the raging powers of evil, and prepares the way before thy face to the eternal home of his Father and thy Father, of his God and thine. This is not a phantasy, a rainbow creation of the brain. It is truth. Nothing is truth, if this is not. It is the declaration of God, and may be relied upon. So then rejoice, and be exceeding glad. Humbly but confidently make haste, in the simplicity of faith, to possess thyself of the wealth of thy inheritance. And for ever, in grateful entertainment of Christ as the Mediator, go on to learn—as in such case thou shalt

learn—what this Scripture means, in the length and breadth and depth and height of it, when it affirms that by Christ men may all and eternally come unto God.

There is yet one more voice of the doctrine, which we must not miss.

Let no man despise or neglect the Mediator. If we have ears to hear, we shall not fail to note this solemn undertone of our passage. Man comes short of God for ever, if he does not seek Him through the Mediator. Not only do atheism and wickedness cut themselves off from God. The idolatry of self-pleasing; the intellectual pride, which chooses to shape its own course independently of the Gospel revelation; the religious negligence of the multitude, occupied only with the sensible and present; are all guilty of the same spiritual suicide. There is one unpardonable sin, just one. It is a wilful and final contempt of the Mediator. This high affront upon his perfections and government God will not forgive. He will not, because He cannot. In the nature of things, to repudiate or ignore the only means of restitution which God has provided for man, the only means which the circumstances of the case allowed to be provided, must of necessity carry with it an absolute and irreversible excision from God. God refuses, and will for ever and ever refuse, to sustain the parental relation towards all such of mankind as trample under foot his redeeming Son, and practically count the blood of the covenant a common thing. “There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;” and “how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”

THE BLESSEDNESS OF FAITH.

“JESUS saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”—
JOHN XX. 29.

THESE words of our Lord connect themselves with an affecting incident of his history. The hands of wicked men had slain Him, and the faith of his disciples had reeled under the shock. “We thought that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel. But He is dead. And Israel’s Redeemer could not die !”

It was the darkness of a night-time: light came in the morning. The third day was the resurrection alike of the Master and the disciples. As the day went on, Jesus showed Himself alive to several of them, either apart or together; and on the evening of the day, their assembled company had evidence not to be questioned—the evidence of eye and ear—that the reason for their panic existed no longer.

There was an exception, however. Thomas Didymus was not of the number of those, to whom Christ manifested Himself in private; and he was absent from the evening assembly. Certainly not for want of love to Christ. The apostle who, but a week or two earlier, when the Master was going into danger, spoke out so nobly, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him,” must have been strangely altered, if this could be the case. Probably Thomas was a man of reserved and contemplative habit of mind; his sensibilities were keen, not without a tincture of morbid-

ness ; and the death of his Lord so utterly unnerved and paralysed him, that he could not endure society, but hied him into secret there to nurse the anguish which consumed his soul. On this hypothesis it is easy to explain as well Christ's subsequent treatment of him, as his own passionate language to his fellow-apostles, when they told him their joyful tidings : "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

The course of a week brought a happy change. Again the disciples were assembled, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus as before, and as before, blessed them. And then, without a moment's warning, like a lightning flash, those thrilling words followed, addressed to the incredulous disciple : "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side : and be not faithless, but believing." No wonder the abashed and stricken mourner cried out as he did : "My Lord and my God !" Christ's reply was brief but pregnant, at once a benediction and a rebuke : "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Opinions will differ as to the degree of blameworthiness attaching to the unbelief of Thomas. In one respect, however, his case is fitted to excite a feeling, in which most of us will share. Few but will be disposed to envy a man, who found himself thus face to face with the unseen world, and to whom the Incarnate Son of God spoke words of love and salvation. How often we have said it ! The glorious objects, amidst which the angels live, which the prophets of old caught glimpses of when the Spirit was upon them—the cherub-lifted throne, with the rainbow about it ; the glorified Mediator, ministering in his sacer-

dotal array in the house not made with hands; the thronging messengers of the celestial court, ascending and descending upon the errands of God; the mysterious wheels, which move all earthly things, and speed them on towards their grand and eternal issues—could our human sense but take cognizance of these majestic realities! Or if this might not be, would to God we could roll the ages backward, and restore the platform of life and experience, of religious opportunity and privilege, on which men like Thomas Didymus and his fellow-apostles stood—men who saw and heard the Word of Life made flesh and dwelling among us! What illumination, what confidence, what equipment of spiritual power for the conflict with evil, what impulse to every good word and work would not come in the train of grace like this! Christ says, No! Blessed are they who believe, because they have seen? Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

The words carry many great lessons with them. One of the most obvious, and at the same time one of wide application, we may usefully dwell upon. The Lord's language suggests—

I.

That the religious privilege, falling to the lot of such of mankind as have the common grace of the Gospel, is abundantly larger than that possessed by those otherwise most favoured of our race, the men who saw and accompanied with Christ in the flesh.

1. Surely this is the fact, so far as concerns the Evidence of our Saviour's Godhead and Divine Apostolate.

At first sight, indeed, it may appear impossible that any evidence touching these master verities should transcend,

in clearness and plenitude, that which was providentially accorded to the apostles and other contemporaries of Christ. To say nothing of the fulfilment before their very eyes of Old Testament prophecy—the stupendous miracles of Christ, his unearthly sanctity and goodness, his teaching passing all known or conceivable doctrines of men, these together must have formed for them a demonstration of his Messiahship and Divinity, such as, we might think, needed no corroboration, and was scarcely capable of receiving any.

Yet, in fact, there was always one serious set-off against this evidence in the plain and palpable humanity of Christ. Were there no other impediment to faith on the part of the disciples, the constant presence of the Lord's manhood, with all the imperfections and needs of manhood distinctly appertaining to it, must have given birth to a thousand hesitations and misgivings, even in the minds of those who were most profoundly moved by the superhuman and Divine in Him.

Now with us this wellspring of incredulity is wholly sealed. Christ is no longer within our presence, a man subject to infirmity and want like ourselves. Our faith in Him is not liable to be staggered by one class of appearances seeming to counterweigh or even neutralize the significance of another. To us Christ is all supernatural, all Divine, like the Father with whom He is one. We know Him not after the flesh. The heavens have taken out of sight that body of his humiliation, which would not now indeed, but which, prior to its glorification, might very easily have stumbled our faith in his Divine nature and mission.

And when we connect with this the witness of the New Testament to Christ ; the authentic records which we have,

both in and beyond Scripture, of the early planting and spread of the Gospel ; the marvellous moral effects, which the preaching of Christianity has produced in the world ; and the accordant experience of countless numbers of mankind, all testifying to the power of Christ to bless and to save ; it becomes manifest that it would be a loss of privilege, and not a gain, were we carried back to the position of those who saw and heard Christ on earth, at least so far as the breadth and fulness of the evidence are concerned, on the credit of which we receive Him as the Divine Saviour of the world.

2. And must we not come to the same conclusion, in view of the Substance of Christian Truth ?

It will not be supposed that the multitudes, to whom Christ spoke in parables, had any preeminence over ourselves in their opportunities of acquaintance with the truth of the Gospel. They were notoriously and confessedly left by Christ in ignorance of much, which He only professed to teach his elect disciples. Some faint rays merely of the eternal sunlight were let in upon their spiritual darkness.

And it would be a mistake to assume that the apostles themselves, before Christ's ascension to heaven, were better taught than we are in the things of the kingdom of God. Whatever unrecorded instructions may have been given them assuredly fell far below the dimension, variety, and explicitness of our knowledge. One of the last words ever spoken by Jesus to his disciples was to the effect that He had many things to tell them, which they were not then capable of receiving, but that by and by the Holy Ghost would teach them all things. So that, according to Christ's own representation, the Gospel verities were but imperfectly discovered so long as He was upon earth ; the fulness of the revelation being reserved for the Pentecostal

era, in which it is our happiness to live. With regard to the effects of the fall, the nature and demerit of sin, the grounds and method of our redemption, the Divine plan of justifying the ungodly, the person and offices of the Holy Spirit, the kind and degree of preparation requisite in order to everlasting life, the condition of separate souls, eternal rewards and punishments—in a word, with regard to all the sublime principles, agencies, and issues of the Gospel, the knowledge within our reach is immeasurably larger and more complete than that which even the chiefest apostle could compass, while the Lord was among men.

3. Equally obvious is the balance of privilege, when we think of that prime grace of the Gospel, the Knowledge of Salvation by the Remission of Sins.

Here perhaps more than anywhere else we are apt to draw unfavourable contrasts between our own religious circumstances and those of our Lord's contemporaries. Could we but bring our spiritual pollution into that blessed presence, where the leper knelt! Might we but look through the streaming tears of our penitence towards that holy face, which beamed love and salvation for her that was a sinner! The music of that one word, *Forgiven*, *Forgiven*, uttered by Christ's own lips—did that but fall upon our ears! What a clearing up of our perplexities, what a trooping away of our terrors, would not this grace bring with it! How overflowing our joy would be; how strong our assurance; how stedfastly we should walk before God in the obedience of faith!

Now in all this there is much that is fallacious, much belonging to the case which we forget or overlook. Are we sure that, if Christ were still on earth, we should be at all inclined to seek after Him? What reason have we for supposing, that the same hindrances of shame, pride, and

worldliness, which prevented so many, when He was among us, from holding any communication with Him, would not operate to keep us at a distance? And were it otherwise, why, we would ask, should the utterance of Christ's own lips, attesting our interest in Him, be at all more satisfactory than that inward, supernatural witness of pardon which God, under the Gospel, gives to all believers through the Divine Spirit? Is the Spirit inferior to the Son? Are his words, addressed to the soul, less intelligible and trustworthy than those which the Saviour spoke to the ear of sense? And what possible certificate can we have, that the moral results of forgiveness, as pronounced by Christ on earth, must have been greater than those which attend that same forgiveness as He now bestows it from heaven. Is any spiritual change more real and lasting imaginable, than that which Christ's regenerating Spirit works in all who receive Him, making the old things pass away and all things become new?

And if the common privilege of the Gospel be not less than that of Christ's contemporaries in this view of the grace of it, there are two respects at least in which, under the same aspect, it is undeniably superior. In the first place, we understand, better than they did, the way of salvation through Christ. And in the second place, Christ is accessible to us as He was not to the bulk of mankind in the days of his flesh.

Men did not then know, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man, and that all who believed in Him should be justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. Then the way into the holiest through the blood of the everlasting covenant, was not made manifest, nor was it within human cognizance, that a free, full, present, and

Divinely attested forgiveness of sins was offered to all men in the Gospel without money and without price. And even if this had been familiar revelation in the time of Christ, his contemporaries would still have lain under another disability ; for the spiritual blessings, which He conferred, were usually limited to his personal presence, and to personal application to Him on the part of those who sought them. If He blessed here, He did not bless yonder. His ministry in one city deprived all others of the light and joy of it. Should we wish to see this economy restored ? Better, far better, that the mercy seat should be everywhere, and that where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, He should be invisibly present in the midst of them !

4. Once more, in view of the comparative means, enjoyed by Christ's immediate disciples and ourselves, for obtaining a perfect preparation for eternal life, the same judgment must obtain.

The aids and incentives to holiness, with which the personal attendants of Christ were privileged, were, it is true, exceptionally and transcendently great. When we think of those solemn and affecting views of the character of God, of the evil of sin, and of the beauty and excellence of religion, which were furnished them by Christ's personal teaching ; when we connect with this the influence for good which his miracles and other public acts were fitted to produce upon them ; and when we add to all the moral force of his most attractive, impressive, and constraining example ; we must acknowledge, that they were among the most distinguished of mankind, both in respect of the dissuasives from evil, and of the motives and encouragements to sanctity, with which their life was gifted.

At the same time we may easily overestimate this ex-

ceeding privilege, in so far as the directness and certainty, with which it should act upon and mould the character of the disciples, are concerned. It was not of itself and as matter of course an instrument of salvation. It wrought by no irresistible spell to produce the spiritual effects contemplated by it. Have we never seen the mud cottage lean against the palace wall? Who is ignorant, that the foulest abominations may fester and revel in sight of the incorruptible sunshine of heaven? And the case of Judas Iscariot makes it only too clear, that sin in its most revolting forms can hold its ground under the eye of the Omniscient Holy One Himself, and despite all moral energies that may be brought to bear against it, may run its full course of insane wilfulness and ruin.

Besides, we have no reason to believe that our Lord's disciples, so long as He was with them, had even the opportunity of securing the holiness and spiritual perfection, which are now both possible and obligatory for the Church of Christ. It was not, in strictness, until He returned to the Father, that that sentence of death, of which St. Paul speaks, was pronounced upon sin in man's fallen nature. Not until then was it the common duty and privilege of Christians to walk in the light as God is in the light, and to be filled with all the fulness of God. Every other consideration apart, the fact that the Holy Ghost was only given when Jesus was glorified, suffices to show, that in these respects we are not a whit behind, but on the contrary are far more highly favoured than were even the men who companied with Christ during his public ministry on earth. Yes. The Holy Spirit remonstrates with men for sin now with a piercing tenderness and energy, such as did not then mark his operations. He gives the knowledge of salvation now with an immediate-

ness, a vividness, and an affluence of certitude, such as was rarely vouchsafed before the date of Pentecost. He endues believers, in these last days, with a power to be holy as God is holy, such as was often desired, but was seldom or ever realised, until Christ, the conqueror of sin, ascended on high, and received of the Father the perfect recompense of his passion in perfect gifts of grace for mankind.

In all these particulars, while those were blessed who saw the Incarnate Christ and believed in Him, his people of the after generations, who do not see but yet believe, are more truly blessed.

Let the text be viewed under another aspect.

II.

In accordance with the general principles upon which God is wont to govern the creatures, it is better that we be called to live for a while by faith and not by sight.

1. It would seem to be a law of the Divine administration, at least in this world, that, other things being equal, the inward satisfaction and gladness belonging to the service of God should be in proportion to the difficulties of the service. The lighter the cross, the smaller the enjoyment. The more exacting the demand made upon our courage and constancy, the more abundant that celestial peace in the soul, which passeth understanding. Now if this be so, plainly, in view of the immediate rewards of godliness, our providential circumstances, as at present ordained, will be more favourable than they would be, if the way to heaven was more open and attractive. And such is without doubt the fact. Were it not for the renunciation of the world, the crucifixion of self, the wrestling with evil within and around, which go hand in hand with the return of a sinful spirit to God,

there would be little of that gushing rapture, or of that solemn, tender joy too deep for words, which comes so often with the first revelation of Christ to the believer. If evangelical truth, in its sublimer mysteries, were accessible to every vagrant aspiration of the Christian intelligence, if they looked in upon the soul with a blaze and penetration, which nothing but a wooden unconcern could shutter out, how poor a harvest of Divine delight would they furnish, compared with that now yielded to the toilsome husbandry of thought and study and devotion! And when we pray, and when we labour for Christ, and in connection with our prayers and labours find the peace which the world never gives, we owe this blessed experience greatly to the spiritual hindrances which block our approach to God, and to the outward pressure and trial, which are more or less inseparable from a holy life. Did a law of sight obtain within the sphere of our Christian calling, it would not comport with the methods of God's moral government, that we should "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

2. A life of faith is fitted to produce an entireness, a symmetry, and a perfection of Christian character, such as could scarcely come by a less trying process. Who that has marked the ways of God, and has studied his fellow men, but has observed, that those Christians are usually the wisest and meekest, the most spiritual, self-denying, and diligent, to whom the largest share of temptation and Providential trouble has fallen; and that, on the contrary, there is commonly a defective, misshapen, or sickly growth of the soul, where discipline of this description has been wanting or scanty? And what is true on a narrower is true also on a wider scale. The perfecting of the Church for the duties of time, and still

more, we believe, for the felicity and unknown services of heaven, is only to be secured under the operation of the law of faith in the unseen and inscrutable God and Saviour of all. Were the pressure, which faith imposes, only lifted off the Church, pride would in all likelihood take the place of humility within her, self-worship would supplant the spirit of reverent consecration to Christ, and an earthly hardness and insensibility would choke those living fountains of charity, the drying up of which would be her own destruction. The Captain of human salvation was made perfect by suffering; and the trial of faith, both for the individual Christian, and for the Church at large, would seem to be an indispensable condition of our becoming eventually like Him.

3. As it would appear, too, the ultimate rewards of creatures like ourselves are determined very much, as to their degree, by the severity of the ordeal, which constitutes moral probation. It is dangerous, indeed, within the sphere of the spiritual, to argue confidently to the unknown from the known; and a keen-eyed jealousy should watch our reasonings, the moment we pass off the ground of explicit revelation. But so far as we know and can judge, such creatures are never admitted to a condition of perfect bliss until after proof has been had of their fidelity to God under circumstances of trial; and in all cases—subject only to the action of that Divine Sovereignty, which appoints one hour of work to one servant and many hours to another—the eventual recompense of reward is distinctly measured by the strain, which the will and Providence of God have previously put upon us. If there be creatures, whose final estate is determined apart from probation, we can hardly imagine them possessors of a dignity and blessedness comparable

to those of beings, who have suffered and so are perfected. And it is equally incompatible with our conceptions of God, and with the analogies of the Divine government, as it falls under our observation, to suppose that such a law of proportion as we have spoken of does not obtain, where probation actually takes place. And with this principle before us, nothing can be more manifest than that it is better for us, that for a season we should be called to live a life of faith rather than that we should at once reach our everlasting estate and condition by the less difficult ascent of sight. This doubtless is the reality of our case. We owe it to the obscurities, the checks, the embarrassments, the struggles, the labours of our career on earth, that we are able to look forward to so magnificent a future as that which the Gospel exhibits to Christian fidelity and hope. The joys of eternity, and the services of the unseen temple of the heavens, would be abundantly less sublime and glorious, were it not that we must enter into the kingdom of God through the strait gate, and that those who walk with Christ for ever in the white robes must have come to Him out of spiritual tribulation.

4. Lastly, the enhancement, which the heavenly blessedness will receive from the foregoing exercises of a life of faith, forms further illustration of this same doctrine. There is not a good of this world, the fruit of pains and trouble, which is not the sweeter for the price we pay to win it. How many a sorrow of the past gives relish to our present wellbeing, and will add zest and intensity to all the future joys of our lifetime! And if the superiority of a probation of faith to a course of life, which should all along exclude such discipline, be apparent anywhere, it is in this—that the enjoyment of the

celestial rewards will be unspeakably heightened by the hazards, toils, and conflicts, through which Divine grace has enabled us to make our way to them. Who shall tell us what the experience must be, when the unbodied spirit of a saint first finds itself in paradise, when its wondering and ecstatic consciousness wakes up to the fact that it is with Christ, and that its safety, rest, and blessedness are assured for ever? It would be an ineffable fruition, under any circumstances, to pass into such a condition of being from an inferior estate of creature life. But how vastly, must we believe, this blessedness will be augmented, in the case of Christ's servants redeemed from among men, through the tax which up to that time has been levied, in the Providence of God, upon their faith and patience! Nor will the happiness be that of a moment only; for throughout eternity it cannot but constitute an important factor of the heavenly joy, that it was after patiently enduring the will of God amidst the darkness and distresses of our earthly probation, that we were counted finally worthy to inherit the promises. In this application also it is divinely true—"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

The text has other and very significant aspects. For example:

1. *It has its aspect towards Christian Belief.*

It throws a strong shadow upon the views of those who anticipate a future and temporal reign of Christ upon earth. Whatever advantage such a state of things might be supposed to confer upon the Church, the existence of it, on the principle of the text, would be a diminution and not a heightening of its present privilege. We now know Christ no longer after the flesh; and neither the Divine Head of the Church nor any of its members would gain by

the recurrence of a dispensation, which, in the purpose of God, was strictly for a season, and was never to be repeated. Even were Ezekiel's vision reproduced before our eyes as a sensible reality, the crystal canopy and glowing gold would be no enhancement of the glory which Christ's Church already enjoys under the sovereignty of her invisible, exalted Lord.

2. It has its aspect towards Christian Sentiment and Observance.

Not only does it regard with disfavour, it distinctly frowns upon all interposition of the material and human between God in Christ and the soul of man. The history of Christianity has often exhibited a tendency to this grave error. Human nature, it has been taught, is low and gross, while the unseen realities are subtle and elevated; and if these incongruous elements are to be brought together, a mystic force must be found, which shall charm them into amity. The consecrated priest, the solemn formula, the symbolical rite, the holy image or picture, the sacred hymn—objects of sense charged with the magic of the supernatural, these must be the meeting-ground for heaven and earth. There is nothing like this in the text. There is nothing like it in the Bible. The New Testament prescribes a twofold sacramental symbol—the water of baptism, and the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper. It ordains no other. It recognises no other. Here is the Scriptural limit to symbols of every kind in the Church of Christ. We do not say that no others are allowable, still less that all besides are sinful. But this we do affirm—that the entire genius of Christianity is hostile to religious symbolism, and that, if the history of the Church teaches anything at all, it utters a strong caution against the free and luxurious use of sense as a helpmate to faith. Faith

needs no such auxiliary. It is above and beyond it. "We have an altar, of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle." It is impious to set up Moses' candlestick again, now that the sun is risen, and pours his radiance through the open windows of God's holy habitation. The supreme and most imperial blessings of the Gospel are the common right and inheritance of all those of mankind, who draw nigh to God through faith in the invisible Mediator betwixt us and Him.

3. It has its aspect towards Christian Character and Life.

It rebukes in us the spirit of religious discontent and envy. When we cast our eyes over the world as it is and has been, we remark a multitude of particulars in which the Divine dispensations seem to us to admit of amendment. Why—we ask ourselves—was human nature allowed to lapse into sin? Why is there not a universal and equal revelation? Why a Bible with puzzles and uncertainties in it? And our own circumstances perpetually prompt the suggestion that were this or that but altered, our spiritual interests would be indefinitely furthered. In all this there is delusion, not to say sin. The moral government of God is not a mistake or an experiment. God has done the best for mankind, the best for ourselves, which the nature of the case admits. The improvements, which our peevish unbelief demands, are possible in imagination only, not in fact. "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." Not one of our race but has the opportunity of everlasting salvation through the known or unknown Redeemer. Let each improve the talents, fewer or more, committed to his trust: he shall not fail of the Master's joy in the day of account.

Again, the text suggests the greatness of our religious obligation as Christians. The privilege which we possess is not only adequate ; it is ample, it is affluent. God has placed us, in his Providence, on a platform of grace so high, that none was ever higher, none in time to come can ever rise above it. How great a height was that, on which the personal attendants of Incarnate God were permitted to stand ! Our vantage-ground is loftier still. Have we pondered this ? All down the vast scale of religious advantage, graduated by the hand of God Himself, no height so high as ours, who, though we see not, have yet the opportunity of knowing the fulness of truth as it is in Jesus ! God forbid that we should be babes in Gospel wisdom, experience, and life, when the ends of the world are upon us, and when the dispensation of the Spirit has supplanted the narrower, evanescent economy of vision and sense !

Once more—these words of Christ open a glorious prospect of blessing from God, as the fruit and recompense of faith. Men may lead a life built upon a speculative principle of sight, as though nothing existed which might not be determined by the chemist's test-tube or the astronomer's telescope and prism. Or recognising things beyond the range of sense, they may act habitually as if they were not. What is the voice of the text touching a life of sight ? God has no benediction for such a life—this is its voice. It may be an intellectual life ; it may be stately ; it may be prosperous. It is always unblessed. And it will be a failure. The benediction of God is reserved for faith. "Blessed are they that believe." With them religious doubt shall sooner or later give place to supernatural certitude. The painful sense of sin shall be lost in the revelation of God's paternal grace in his atoning Son. The

eyes of their soul being opened by the finger of the Spirit, they shall behold the glory of the Lord, and their moral nature shall be changed into the likeness of that glory. The afflictions of Providence shall be mysteriously transmuted for them into treasures of spiritual gladness and power. All things, according to an immutable counsel of God, shall work together for their good. Soon eternity with strong hand shall put its countersign on the heavenly oracle, and shall make plain for ever what till then must needs remain a secret—how blessed they are of mankind, who have not seen, but yet have believed.

TRUE LOVE FOR CHRIST.

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.”—JOHN xiv. 21.

“If a man love Me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”—JOHN xiv. 23.

“If ye love Me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth.”—JOHN xiv. 15, 16.

CHRISTIANITY, so far as it is personal and experimental, is the love of Christ. It has other characters, indeed, and other phases. It is a radiant constellation of Divine doctrines. It is a marvellous series of Divine miracles. It is a supernatural polity, threading and interpenetrating all mundane interests, having laws, immunities, privileges all its own and all Divine. But out of history, books, and the external sphere of things, viewed as belonging to the individual man, his duty, character, and wellbeing for ever, it is the love of Christ.

The text—part of that immortal sermon, which Christ preached to his disciples just before He suffered—expounds the nature of this love, and sets forth its transcendent blessedness and excellency.

I.

The Love of Christ, as to its true Nature and Character.

The mould and tone of the language suggest a contrast; as though the Lord would have us distinguish between

that of which He speaks, and something besides, which, while purporting to be the love of Christ, is not the very reality, but merely semblance, shadow, or at best an imperfect copy and image of it. Only just before He spoke, there had been a living example of such a love in the presence of Himself and his hearers. And all down the Christian centuries, the truth and the mockery have stood side by side on this holy ground.

There is a Love of Christ, which is Affected. We see it in Judas Iscariot. He was one of the twelve. He went in and out with Christ. To appearance he was all that the other disciples were. So far as we know, he had the confidence of his brethren. The world undoubtedly looked upon him as one of the elect attendants of the great Master. Yet he was not a disciple. He was a hypocrite, and wore a mask. He carried an idol about with him in the bag. His love for Christ was assumed and counterfeit. And he has not been alone. He has had successors—how many let us not presume to judge—men who, for mercenary, selfish purposes, have said “Lord, Lord!” but have not in sincerity and truth loved Christ.

There is a Love of Christ, which is Visionary. When Simon Magus saw the apostolic miracles, it is said of him that he “believed.” So he himself thought. And in a sense he did. He recognised the tokens of a superhuman power, and attached himself to the cause of the Nazarene. He presented to his generation the startling spectacle of a second Balaam in love with Christ. And his love was not a falsehood in act like “the traitor’s.” But it was an illusion. We have it on the highest authority—he had neither part nor lot in the matter; his heart was not right in the sight of God. And his case is not unique. It has its modern equivalents. How much Christianity of our

own times consists in acknowledgment of Gospel verity, in respect for Christian institutions, in love of the calm of Sundays and the chimes of church bells, in the religious awe and pensiveness inspired by architecture, painting, music, and other kindred forces? Is it a false charity, or a true one, which teaches that, if Christ be very God, and human sense and reason have any worth, there are living Christians, so called, not a few, whose love to Christ is a delusion and a dream?

There is a Love of Christ, which is Morbid. This kind of love to Him is a true love; but it is unhealthy and diseased. It has its eyes turned in upon itself. It subjects itself to perpetual crossquestioning as to its own reality. It takes a strange delight in pulling up the roots of its life, to see if they are growing. It spends its days under the microscope of a curious and tormenting self-inspection. It views human society with distrust, and seeks to hide itself away from the vulgarity, coarseness, and defilement of earthly things. It shrinks from Christian activity under the plea, that its motives are not pure enough. It occupies life, perhaps, in self-reproaches, tears, and weary discipline of the flesh, ever aiming at a perfectness, which always flees from it the further, the more persistently it is sought after. Is this a rare species of love for Christ? Such a love, not improbably, in one of its manifold forms, was that of the apostle Thomas, as he appears in the familiar passage of the Gospel, where we read of his want of faith in the Lord's resurrection. It abounded in the early Christian centuries. It is not uncommon now. It is a type of Christianity, which is apt to show itself in delicate natures; in women, rather in men, because of their finer sensibilities; and in persons of secluded habit of life of both sexes. It has been in all

ages the curse of monasteries, cloisters, and colleges. Persecution has often begotten it. So has the prevalence of wickedness. So have a high state of civilisation, want of moral earnestness, and neglect of the practical duties of the Christian calling. The affection has its aspects of beauty, and it has again and again set the world on a blaze of religious enthusiasm. But it is much to be dreaded. It carries a plague in its bosom, and tends to fanaticism, pride, misanthropy, indolence, and every kind of immorality.

There is a Love of Christ, which is Partial and Unworthy. Only just before Christ spoke, Peter had said, "I will go with Thee, both into prison and to death;" and Jesus had answered, "The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied Me thrice." What followed is but too familiar to us. Did not Peter love Christ? He loved Him passionately. But he made the commonest of all mistakes—he overestimated his love. It was a genuine feeling and strong, but it was not equal to all emergencies; it was inconstant, imperfect, inadequate; and so it vanished away, as soon as it stood face to face with a serious peril. Alas, the like love to Christ is spread far and wide among his disciples. How shall we define it? It is a love, which is not ignorant of Him, nor indifferent to Him. On the contrary, it thinks of Christ; reveres Him; is pledged to his cause; says truly, "Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee;" breaks out now and again into vehement devotion, or flaming zeal for his glory. Yet it is not in all respects and at all seasons what a true and worthy love will be. It is divided, uncertain, equivocal, lacking. It fails to cover the whole field of Christian obligation and duty; and times and occasions will find it shivering with fear, or even skulking away into discreditable hiding-places.

The Love of Christ—what is it?

When we speak of love, we do not always mean the same thing. Sometimes we mean an affection, which is simply the offspring of instinct and feeling, with little or no concurrence of the mind and judgment. At other times we intend a much nobler sentiment, one which involves and is indissolubly joined with the working of the intelligence, and of every generous and lofty quality of the soul. These two things, so unlike one another, because they coincide in certain respects, we style in common Love. Yet they are often discriminated in human speech. The language of the New Testament discriminates them. And in the text, the term employed to denote the Love of Christ is one of a group consecrated to the service of the higher affection. So that the very name suggests and prepares the way for the doctrine laid down by our Lord respecting it.

The Love of Christ is not a blind, foolish, fanciful, moody, self-wrapped, impractical thing. It supposes knowledge, discrimination, choice, sympathy, and above all sure, appropriate, and unceasing action.

It supposes Acquaintance with Christ. How can we love, strictly and properly speaking, that which we do not know? How can we love Christ, if we are ignorant of his person, work, character, claims, promises? In the connection in which the text stands in the Gospel, our Lord makes the highest account of the possession by his disciples of a true and exact knowledge of Him; He labours to furnish them with this knowledge; and He declares, that one of the great benefits, which the advent of the Comforter should secure to them would be, that they should know—what a modern school of religious opinion would hold to be perfectly immaterial, as belonging to a

formulated and technical theology—the mystery of his Divine relation to the Father, and of the Father's Divine relation to Him. And such is the invariable teaching of New-Testament Scripture. In the nature of things it must be so. All true love of Christ presupposes, it may be a partial and immature, but yet a real knowledge of Him. Knowledge is not the measure of love, but it is its companion, and one of the chosen spheres of its indestructible activity.

The Love of Christ, moreover, implies Affection for Christ. It is not difficult to imagine—what often presents itself in actual life—a knowledge of Christ, large, precise, and symmetrical, which yet is wholly divorced from any alliance of the heart and will. It is mere mental acceptance of the truth respecting Him—nothing besides. The Love of Christ is a humble, grateful, glad, holy, heaven-born affection for Christ. The soul which possesses it is filled with shame and compunction before God for the sin which rendered the redemption necessary. It looks with reverent admiration upon Christ as the one only Saviour from God's righteous anger for sin, and rejoices in Him as the reconciliation and peace of the world. It thankfully trusts in his merits for acceptance with God, and stakes its eternal all upon his great and precious promises. It lives in the presence of the unseen mercysseat where Christ pleads and blesses, and is in sacred sympathy with his mediatorial purposes, claims, and will. It occupies itself with prayer and praise to Him, and labours to be like Him in the sight both of God and man. And all this stamps the true Love of Christ with a supernatural character—stamps it with divinity. It is not a condition of the soul, which a man can command at will; an endowment, which, if he pleases, he can confer upon himself.

It is the gift of God. No man is able to receive it, except the Father draw him. Wherever the Love of Christ is found in human hearts, it is shed abroad there by the Holy Ghost. At the same time, it is a feeling of the soul towards Christ, varying perhaps, like the purely human emotion of love, in its modes and manifestations, according to temperament, education, and other circumstances, yet never losing the distinctive quality of a sacred passion, having as its object the loving, atoning, interceding, reigning Christ. Nor should the disciples of the Lord, subject to the guidance of a wise discretion, shrink from giving scope to this divine affection, whether in language or in act. Would to God, that the Love of Christ were but as a fire in our bones, burning to ashes our miserable conceit and self-worship; killing in us for ever the frost and prudery of our earthly souls; and setting us in flaming, vehement motion for the glory of God, and for the religious benefit of mankind!

But chiefly and preeminently, the Love of Christ is Obedience to Christ. This is Christ's own definition. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me."

There is a sense in which Knowledge of Christ is love to Him. When we attain to it as the result of devout study and prayer, when we seek, with a true spiritual sympathy, to grow and abound in it, knowledge falls under this blessed category of Love. It is no longer in contrast with love, or even in subordination to it. It takes rank with the celestial virtue itself, and forms part of its substance.

Still more obviously does a gracious Affection for Christ enter into the substance of Love to Him. When the soul accepts with lowliness and reverence the unwelcome doctrine of sin, which Christ preaches; when, despite the

incredulity which the marvellousness of the Gospel message is fitted to awaken in us, we believe the love which God has for us in his Son, and rejoice in the assurance that for his sake our names are written in heaven ; when we go to the altar of God with a heart full of loyalty to Christ, and there consecrate our being to his glory ; such dispositions and attitudes of soul are the very love of Christ in us.

But something deeper and more far-reaching is intended by our Saviour's language. Knowledge may be love to Him, and Affection is love. But if we will comprehend the great characteristic of the Christian life, at once in its essence and in all the compass and range of its supernatural energies, it is Obedience to Christ. It is the soul's acceptance of Christ as the authoritative revelation of God, and the practical surrender of all its faculties and capacities to his blessed will.

It is to live in Piety towards God. Christ and the Father are one. The glory of the Son is the glory of the Father also. And it is the first demand of the Love of Christ, that, as He came not to do his own will but that of the Father, so God, even the Father, should be glorified in all things in Him by his faithful disciples. A true love to Christ will always take the form of reverence towards God, as distinguished from profanity and irreligious levity, whether in word or deed. It will cultivate habits of devotion, prayer, and worship. It will do honour to God, in the eyes of all men, by an open profession of attachment to his service. It will visibly regulate our behaviour in all the affairs of life—the choice of our dwelling, the conduct of our business, the settlement of our children, the use of our property. In marked opposition to the principles of those, who seek to gratify themselves, and who therefore “regard not the law of the Lord, nor the opera-

tion of his hands," as the prophet speaks, the men who love Christ will make it their supreme concern to be at one with God in all his revealed will, and humbly to work together with Him for the accomplishment of it in its season. "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which sent Him." On the other hand, there is an ineffable jealousy in the Son for the Father's glory, and He will recognise no love for Himself, which does not show forth the praises of Him, of whom, and by whom, and to whom are all things in earth and heaven.

It is to live in personal Self-Control and Purity. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Holiness both of the flesh and of the soul is a peremptory obligation of the Love of Christ. It is easy to find those, who cannot love Christ, because, though they are not in the common acceptation of the terms, profane or wicked, they are effeminate, indolent, and self-pleasing. The Love of Christ requires a universal restraint of the natural appetites and passions. It lays an absolute embargo upon all approach to immodesty, intemperance, and luxurious living. It claims a holy dominion over the words of the lips and the meditations of the heart. Licentiousness, impure conversation, sensual indulgence, habits of sloth, evil imaginings—they bar and kill the Love of Christ, wherever they are found. As He was in this world, in point of personal self-government, sanctity, and readiness for every good work, so He expects his people, who love Him, to "present themselves" habitually "to God as those who are alive from the dead, and their members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

It is to live in Truth, Justice, and Charity towards all men. It is a great mistake to resolve Christianity into

merely social ethics. The Love of Christ stretches far beyond what is usually known as relative duty. At the same time such duty is not only comprehended by the Gospel ; it is prescribed and enjoined, and that with the utmost emphasis and solemnity. "See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." "This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also." "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar : for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom He hath not seen ?" The connection of the text, indeed every part of the New Testament, lays the greatest stress upon the cultivation and practice, by Christ's disciples, of a high and unfaltering morality in all their intercourse with mankind. No more shocking outrage upon the very genius of Christianity is possible, than that a profession of love to Christ should be coupled with falsehood, fraud, oppression or any species of unrighteousness. A man of equivocal speech and slippery promises ; a man, who for selfish and earthly objects deals unjustly by his neighbour ; a man, whose life is spent in heaping money together, without regard to the wants of his fellows ; a man, who allows the Gospel and mankind to take their chance, so far as any practical sympathy on his part is concerned—such a man may be in his own estimation, and in that of the world, a Christian. Under the burning eyes of Him, with whom he has to do, and whose blessed name he desecrates, he is a hypocrite, and will not miss his reward. Indeed the law of Love to Christ is not satisfied with a negative goodness, where the interests of others are involved. On the contrary, it makes it incumbent upon all who will obey it, that, in imitation of Christ, they minister actively to the welfare of their fellow-men, and by self-denying efforts for

their temporal and spiritual wellbeing, spread the savour of Christ to the very ends of the earth.

Yes ! knowledge, experience, professions of attachment to Christ, the form of godliness,—they are all nothing, if we do not keep Christ's commandments of piety, purity, and charity. Lovest thou Me? Then thou wilt serve God, and not live the life of an atheist ; thou wilt keep thyself clean in body and mind as the consecrated vessel of God, always meet for his use ; thou wilt act towards thy fellow-disciples as a brother ; and, in all thy commerce with the world, wilt let thy works of mercy, justice, and truth so shine, that men may see them, and seeing them “may glorify thy Father, which is in heaven.”

But while the text thus treats of the Nature and Character of the Love of Christ, it calls our attention to :

II.

The Blessedness and Divine Excellence of this Love.

When Jesus spoke, his apostles were in trouble ; and they might well be. In fulfilment of their Lord's commandments, they were about to go on their great mission to mankind ; and Christ—their light, and staff, and unspeakable consolation—they knew, would not be with them. No wonder, with such prospects, they were depressed and fainthearted. And now that the first struggles of the Gospel are over, and that it is well established in the earth, the task is not an easy one, which the Love of Christ imposes upon its possessors. The nature of it must be misconceived and its dimensions underrated, if we judge it easy. Let circumstances be ever so favourable, to love Christ with the love, which He expects and accredits, must always put a heavy tax upon the intelligence, feeling, and

will of his servants. But to do this is as blessed as it is difficult. So Jesus taught his apostles in view of their special vocation. He introduced, commingled, and ended all his doctrine touching their duty to Him with words of good cheer, and with most moving, ravishing promises of Divine help and blessing. And the Church of Christ is heir for ever to the grace bestowed upon its first, representative members.

The Blessedness of those who love Christ, as the text and the connection describe it, is threefold, consisting in :

1. The Love of the Father and the Son.
2. The Manifestation of this love by the coming of the Father and the Son.
3. The Dwelling in them of the Father and the Son.

And all this in company with and through the agency of that Divine Teacher and Comforter, the Holy Ghost, whom Christ declared He would send to be with his people when He was gone from them. In a word, the felicity in question is no other than a glorious adoption and occupation, by the Eternal and Undivided Trinity, of the souls, which have in them the true Love of Christ.

Two observations are suggested, in passing, by the wonderful Scripture paragraph before us. First—How strong incidental proof it furnishes of the doctrine of the Trinity ! It makes the Christian salvation—the very acme and crown, that is to say, of God's grace to mankind—in all its parts and stages, to be the equal work of the Father and the Son. The love, the coming, and the inhabitation of the soul are each and all attributed both to the one and to the other of the Divine Persons. At the same time the blessedness of the salvation—the knowledge of it, the peace of it, the spiritual life and energy of it—are all and severally referred to the presence and operation,

as well in individual Christians as in the Church at large, of that good Spirit of God, whom the passage represents to be at once the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. If this language does not compel the doctrine of a Trinity of equal Personal Subsistences in the Divine Nature, we are at a loss to comprehend what the value of words can be, considered as the index and exponent of truth.

The second observation is, that the full meaning of our Lord can only be seen by us afar off. This is a sphere of things, the light of which is too dazzling for our poor human vision ; and, in seeking to traverse it, reason, if it will be rational, must be content to take the hand of faith, and to be led—blind, yet seeing—in the way it should go.

1. *To love Christ is to be loved of the Father and the Son.*

And here is the death blow to the most popular of all the popular delusions of our age. If there be any truth in the fashionable sentiment, which makes the Scriptures affirm, that all men are equally objects of the parental love of God, and all equally interested in the benefits of the redemption, what account shall we give of the text ? The most strenuous believer in the imbecility of the Bible will hardly credit it with the promise, that God, under given circumstances, will bestow his love on those, on whom He has already bestowed it. Does any reader of Scripture need to be told, that in a certain sense God loves all men, and loves them equally ? But this equal love—the same Holy Volume asserts—coexists with an inextinguishable hatred of sin on the part of God, and with a terrible wrath against all who practise it. It can say, and does say, *Anathema !* And it executes the malediction. On the other hand, God's universal love to our

race, is everywhere coupled in the Bible with the promise of a special and preeminent regard for those who obey Him. If the text means anything, it means, that God will look with a peculiar and wholly unutterable favour and complacency upon such of mankind as love Christ. The Divine Son is so dear to the Father, that love for Him in a human soul moves the tenderness of God towards it, and makes it dear to God. Them that love the Son, who is the Beloved of the Father, the Father loves with a love, which passes understanding. Yes, even Christ's love to us, though infinite, is enhanced, and takes new forms of satisfaction and sympathy, when we come to Him from our wanderings, and humbly consecrate ourselves to his holy service. "I will arise, and go to my Father"!—the gracious resolve alone bows the heaven of heavens earthward. And to him who "believes with the heart unto righteousness," as the Scripture speaks, and who keeps Christ's commandments, the adorable Three in One is wholly and always love beyond all power of the creature to define and estimate.

The promise of the text, however, is not simply that of an ineffable love of God for his people, but of this love in manifestation.

2. *To love Christ is to receive the manifestation of the love of God in the coming to the soul of the Father and the Son.*

In human experience nothing is more common than for love to exist, but to remain unmanifested. Opportunity may not have been given for the manifestation, or the fitting season may not have arrived. And there is a love of God to man, existing, but not manifested. Did not God love the world before He sent his Son to redeem it? The love was not manifested. Is He the God of

Christendom only? Is He not also of the nations, that sit in darkness and the shadow of death? Are his loving-kindnesses sealed against the evildoers, who hear the Gospel, and reject it? Does our Father in heaven look without compassion upon the countless multitudes of mankind, who seek after Him but as yet have not found Him? In all these cases there is a love of God towards men, which, for known or unknown reasons, does not at present discover itself, but still continues veiled and secret. Indeed the very servants of God, so long as they are on earth, are the objects of a Divine regard, which at best is only manifested under limitation and reserve. Nor shall we go too far, if we venture to affirm, that even when the counsels of God are complete, and the elect from the four winds are all gathered together in their final home in the heavens, a day will never dawn, in which God shall love his own with a love, leaving no room for further and more glorious manifestation.

Christ makes promise to his apostles, in the text, of a love that should be manifested. Do we marvel that they ask Him, How? Who that loves Christ does not echo the question? And it is answered. "I will come to you." I, the absent Christ, restored to the Father, and once more reigning with Him in the glory of my everlasting Sonship, will make myself present to my follower, and will cause Him to know that I am with him. I will come to him: "we will come"—the Father, with whom I am one, and I, with whom the Father is one, together, by the Holy Ghost, we will come to the soul, and will manifest ourselves to it? Is the explanation a riddle? Surely not a riddle. The Father and the Son, the Father in the Son, by the gracious agency of the Spirit, shall discover the truth, and mercy, and saving virtue of the Gospel, to such

as love Christ. They shall know the love which God has for them in Him, the Spirit Himself bearing witness of the fact to their spirit, so scattering their darkness, quelling their fears, inspiring them with confidence towards God, making their joy full, and preparing their consecrated hearts to be the habitation of God for ever. In other terms, when men love Christ, they become the subjects of a revolution, their ancient selves passing away, and all things becoming new. There is a crisis in their history, the result of the advent of the kingdom of God within them. It is always so. The Divine manifestation may be given at an earlier period in life, or it may be later. It may come like the outburst of a meteor; or it may be as the gentle creeping on of the morning daylight. But under some form or other, and at some time or other, there is the manifestation. The apostles received it at Pentecost; and Pentecost repeats itself in the experience of all who love Christ with the love, which welcomes Him at once as the Saviour of the soul and its Lord. Christianity carries with it this miraculous voucher of its heavenly original: it confers upon all who accept it the unspeakable grace—unknown indeed to the world, but most blessedly known to the recipients—of the love of Christ manifested in the gracious occupation of their nature by the everlasting Trinity. God comes forth from his hiding place, revealing his perfections, telling his name, and transforming the spirit to which the apocalypse is given into his own most sacred image. To use Scripture language, the adoption of sons, the witness of the Holy Ghost, the regeneration of the soul—this and much more is involved in the grace of the love of God, as manifested to all who believe in Jesus.

3. *To love Christ is to enjoy this Divine manifestation as a permanent condition of the soul.*

Here the wondrousness of the promise culminates, and the wealth of it streams forth in all its affluence. Not only will God manifest in Christ, by the Spirit of the Father and the Son, the love which He has for his chosen; the manifestation shall continue, and shall never be withdrawn. "We will come to" them—this is the day-spring. "We will make our abode with" them—here is the long, glorious, ever-strengthening light, which has no eventide. Three things seem to be included in the language. First, the disciples of Christ are assured, that they shall be taught the whole truth of God, so far as is needful for salvation. Secondly, amidst the manifold changes and disquiets of their earthly course, they shall enjoy supernatural peace in God. And thirdly, their very life itself becoming identified with that of Christ, they shall "sit in the heavenly places" with Him, and shall anticipate in their experience, character, and joyful execution of his will, the future, glorious immortality of all the sons of God. "I will not leave you orphans. Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Continued love on your part, shown in keeping my commandments, shall be answered by continued love on my part, evinced in continued manifestations of my personal presence with you as your Instructor, Comforter, Sanctifier, Protector, Guide, by the power of the Holy Ghost. You shall not grope your way in the dark. You shall not struggle alone with temptation. You shall not suffer unsympathized with and uncheered. You shall not witness the good confession in strength of your own finding. You shall not walk in a world full of spiritual dangers without adequate succour. You shall not become the laughingstock of the powers of darkness. I will make my habitation with you. Your spirits, and the sphere of your life, shall be my home, and

the chosen theatre of my Divine activity. I will teach you my perfect will. I will stimulate all devout and gracious desires in you. I will suggest and answer your prayers. I will be your great joy in conflict and desolation. I will keep you from the evil that is in the world. I will make your faces firm as a flint against sin. I will sanctify you wholly. I will bring you, unscathed by the Wicked One, to everlasting felicity and honour. "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, saith the Lord God." What illumination, what strength, what direction, what fulness of joy are implied in all this, who is to describe? Let the love of Christ be in us—in another sense, perhaps, than that which St. Paul's sublime words were intended to bear, yet in a most real and precious sense of them, it shall be true; "neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What bewildering and entrancing views of Heaven does this Scripture open before us! Confessedly the good here spoken of is good pertaining to the present world. It is here on earth God will love us thus, if we truly love his Son whom He hath sent. How of the life, when Christ shall not only come to prepare us for Himself, but to receive us to Himself; when those many mansions in the Father's house shall throw wide their doors to welcome into glory the many sons made perfect by suffering? Lord—we are ready to say—it is too much for us; the very thought of the things which Thou hast prepared for Them that love Thee. Our human weakness quails and

recoils before the presence of the dawning bliss ! Let the strained and straining heart, therefore, find rest for the sole of its foot, where it may. “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”

To how great a height does the Christianity of the New Testament tower above that of most of its professors ! We rehearse our creed. We go through our prayers. We listen to sermons. We call ourselves by one or other of the manifold names which distinguish the visible Church. What of all this ? What of it now—what in the time of the end, when semblances and illusions will vanish away for ever before the light of the great revelation ? Does the Father love us ? Does Christ manifest Himself to us ? Are we “the habitation of God by the Spirit” ? These are the questions. Let it not escape us—Christianity is a Divine experience. It is such an experience as is defined in the text. The human soul, which has in it the love of Christ, receives a blessed apocalypse of God, and is brought into ineffable union with the Lord and giver of everlasting life.

Let all who name the name of Christ be careful to keep his commandments. This is the love of Christ. He knows no other. The first step to heaven, and the last, is the obedience of faith. All spiritual blessing hinges upon it. Many a time God has no more grace to give us, and will hear no more prayer, till our love has authenticated itself in holy action. Let us beware of the subtle Antinomianism, which hopes to compromise for habitual neglect of Christian duty by paroxysms of devotion, and by occasional outbreaks of religious zeal. Do the will of Christ : this is to love Him, and in loving Him to secure, under his own most gracious promise, at once the spiritual prizes of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

ESCAPE FROM TEMPTATION.

“AND lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”—MATT. vi. 13.

1. THESE words of the Lord's Prayer are felt by many to be difficult. Some find them so difficult, even on the surface, that they shrink from using them. As though there must be mistranslation, almost as if, for once, Christ had put too hard a paradox into the mouths of his disciples, they change the petition in the uttering of it—"Leave us not in temptation," or the like.

2. This is assuredly an error. Christ could never bid us offer a questionable prayer. And our Bibles do not misrepresent his meaning. At the same time, we are not wrong in regarding the words as difficult. If there is nothing to trouble us on the surface, there is abundance just below. And in the depths of the passage there are abysses of difficulty, such as no mind of man, at least in this world, will ever be able to fathom.

3. With all the difficulties, however, perhaps the more because of them, the text claims our attention. Possibly some of the darkness may disperse, as we strive to make our way through it. And if otherwise, a thoughtful, reverent consideration of words commended to us by Christ's own lips, will not fail to carry spiritual blessing in its train.

4. The petition of the text is twofold. It is Deprecation: we pray that we may not suffer that, which, we

think, might do us harm. And it is Supplication : we ask that that may be done for us, which, we know, would do us good.

I.

We deprecate evil—"Lead us not into temptation."

1. And so we encounter the surface difficulty. How is it possible that God should lead man into temptation? Does not the Scripture expressly declare it to be impossible? Indeed the very idea of God excludes the possibility. "God is untempted of evils," says St. James, "neither tempteth He any one." To suppose that the Infinitely Pure and Holy One, the Author of the Bible and the worlds, could in any degree, under any conceivable circumstances, move the will of a creature towards evil, would be to suppose that He Himself was evil. The thought of our heart be forgiven us, if we ever so imagined! And yet the text speaks—does it not?—as if it might be so; for to pray "Lead us not into temptation" surely implies, that, if the petition be not answered, God may become our tempter, and lead the way before us into sin.

2. Here, however, we are quite astray. The fact is: all temptation is not the same temptation. There is a kind, which is evil in the moral sense of the term; and there is another kind, which, in this same sense, is not evil. When God tempted Abraham in the matter of Isaac, He did not solicit, or even encourage, him to wrongdoing. And when St. James would have Christians rejoice, if at any time they fall into divers temptations, the last thing he thinks of is, that sinful acts or dispositions are a fitting subject of self-congratulation for the people of God.

3. No. In the text, as in the other passages just referred to, temptation, for the most part, is nothing more than what we commonly know as the trial of Providence. God has been pleased to constitute the world and human nature on the principle, that many things shall be as we wish they were not, and many others shall not be as we wish they were. Every day of our life finds us in circumstances, which are ungrateful to us, and which we would fain alter if we could. Nor are even the most faithful servants of God exempted from this condition of things. Indeed their very character and profession subject them to certain forms of trial, which other men escape.

4. Now as all this is no necessity or accident of the Divine government, so neither does it come of the mere will of God. We cannot too often repeat it ourselves—God wills nothing simply as matter of will. Trial, in all its kinds, has a moral and religious purpose. It is intended to be a corrective of evil in us; a test of character; a discipline in godly knowledge, experience, and service; a training of the soul for a better life to come. Infirmary, privation, toil, sickness, care, disappointment—they are a mysterious agency, by which God seeks to illuminate, hallow, ennoble, and for ever and ever glorify his many sons and daughters, the children of Adam, here upon earth. We have it on his own word. “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.”

5. But how does this doctrine, it may be asked, relieve the text? It takes away one difficulty, it is true: but does it not put another and an equal in its place? If temptation does not imply sin, then indeed there is no profanity in praying, as there otherwise would be, “Lead

us not into temptation.” But if temptation is designed to do us good, how can we wisely or rationally ask to be excused from it? Ought we not rather to say—Lord, however much our nature may contradict and rebel, for our souls’ sake lead us into temptation, that so we may be purified like gold, and may become everlastingly vessels of honour in the heavens !

6. Here the second clause of the text, which couples sin with temptation, comes to our help. For a moral agent the possibility of right is always the possibility of wrong. To be capable of welldoing is, on this very account, to be capable of evildoing. The Divinely ordained endowments and circumstances of the creature are intended to be turned to his own spiritual account, and to the glory of God in him. But, in the very nature of things, to the same degree they may, by the creature’s evil act, be perverted to the Divine dishonour, and to his own personal loss and undoing. And so the trial of Providence, of which we speak as the universal law of human life, designed as it is to be a blessing, not a curse to us, may be, and all along from the beginning of the world has been, an occasion of mischief and ruin to men. Indeed so great is the moral weakness of our nature, and so mighty is the power of evil in and around us, that, apart from the grace of God, temptation always results in evil, not in good. And where it is heavy, “the very elect” can only hold their ground through extraordinary supplies of Divine strength and succour.

7. Thus the door opens to the precise meaning of our Lord. In view of the spiritual hurt, which may accrue to us from trial, He teaches us to deprecate it. Not indeed all trial. This would be to pray, that God would alter the entire plan of his natural and moral government to meet

individual cases. God can do this, if He pleases. He has not tied Himself up by any order of proceeding, from which He cannot deviate. If God wills it, water does not drown, and fire does not burn ; a handful of cakes becomes a meal for thousands ; leprous flesh is clean, on an instant, like that of a little child ; and the buried, putrifying corpse comes forth a living man. All this He has done. But miracles are rare exceptions to the Divine order. God reserves it to Himself to determine, how and when they shall occur. And no man is at liberty to ask, that, on his individual behalf, God will set aside the general course of his Providence, and protect him from the trial, which is the appointed lot of all men. Indeed the text does not suggest, that we shall seek an absolute immunity even from those forms of Providential evil, the action of which is more limited and exceptional. We may perhaps express the purport of the language in some such terms as these. Let not my godly principles be subjected to perilous pressure ! Let not the demand upon my faith, my love, my loyalty, my patience, be greater than I can well bear ! Lead me not, O Lord, Thou father and protector of human souls, into circumstances, which might jeopardise my salvation, and cause the Holy Name, wherewith I am called, to be blasphemed ! Spare thy servant, if Thou canst, the burning furnace and the dreadful cross !

8. If Thou canst ! For let us mark, that in no case must the deprecation of trial be unqualified. All Scripture teaching and example are against this. Indeed the very nature of things is against it. God may see, that, however great the strain, which some particular affliction will put upon us, it is indispensable that we should suffer it. His glory may be at stake. The good of others may render it necessary. Possibly it is the only means, by

which our personal salvation can be finally secured. Apart from such a visitation of Providence, certain evils of our nature might remain for ever uncured ; or certain graces, necessary to our eventual perfecting, might be for ever undeveloped ; or certain services, which we, and no others, could render to the cause of Christ, might—to our own most grievous detriment—go for ever unaccomplished. Thus, for our very advantage, God may try us to the uttermost. But with this restriction—Provided only it be good in thy sight, O Lord !—the tongue of our human infirmity, we had almost said of our natural self-love, is set loose, and we are permitted, nay even encouraged, to speak forth our desire before God. “Lead us not into temptation.” So order thy Providence, we beseech Thee, that we may not suffer trial beyond what Thou knowest to be imperatively requisite in order to our everlasting salvation !

But the Deprecation of the text passes into Supplication.

II.

We supplicate Blessing—“Deliver us from evil.”

1. As we have just seen, the former part of the text read in the light of the latter, implies that it may not be the will of God to hear us, when we ask to be protected from temptation. There may be peremptory reasons why we should undergo it. And now we are further instructed, how we ought to pray in prospect of trial, into which, notwithstanding our deprecation, God may see good to conduct us. “Lead us not into temptation,” if it be thy will. But if Thou ordainest otherwise, then do what we are well assured cannot but be thy will—“Deliver us from evil.”

2. Who does not know, how evil links itself to trial,

how it works with it, and follows in its wake? The very birthday of our race is witness. And alas! all down the manifold lines of human history we have only too abundant illustration of the same melancholy fact. What God would have to be our medicine and nutriment, we make our poison, and by a suicidal wilfulness turn the narrow path of life into the broad, well-trodden road of folly and destruction.

3. We see this in the case of unconverted men. God visits them with trouble—thwarting their schemes, disappointing their expectations, blocking up their way. And his purpose is gracious. He would gain their attention. He would open their eyes. He would bring them near to Himself. He would fain put a diadem of everlasting glory on their head. But this is not the effect. On the contrary, they meet the Divine rebukes with anger, sullenness, contumacy. Like Pharaoh, they harden their hearts, and stiffen their necks. Perhaps they seek comfort—sorry comfort it is—in theoretical scepticism. Perhaps they labour to drown thought by intemperance. Perhaps they rage against God in mad riot and licentiousness. We need not go far to find instances, in which the very means, which God uses to turn men from the error of their ways, have been miserably perverted to evil, and have only aggravated and brought into intenser action their natural hatred of all good.

4. And evil is not far distant, when trial comes upon the godly themselves. Many a servant of Christ, under far less weighty afflictions than those of the man of Uz, has charged God foolishly, and proved recreant to his faith. Do we know nothing of this? How of ourselves, when infirmity has bowed us down, when pain has tortured us, when some terrible bereavement has desolated our homes

and our hearts? How, when circumstances have demanded of us a bold confession of Christ, or when loud calls of duty have summoned us to take up our cross, and do holy work, from which our pride or our indolence has shrunk? Trial, in some or other of its numerous forms, may easily lead the good into spiritual evil. It may beget dark thoughts concerning the wisdom and equity of the Divine counsels. It may dislodge, as by an earthquake shock, the love of God in us, and induce a permanent and final alienation from his service. It may detach us from the ordinances of religion, and the fellowship of the church. It may even drive us once more, in search of felicity, to the broken cisterns, which can hold no water. As an apostle has said, referring directly to this very point—it may even cause us to “draw back unto perdition.”

5. Therefore let us pray—so Christ teaches—If we must needs encounter temptation, Lord! deliver us from the evil. Grant that our natural short-sightedness, self-will, and unbelief may not frustrate thy all-wise purposes concerning us. Let every hard and foolish thought vanish away before the face of our faith. Endue us with a perfect faith in thy perfection. Strengthen us to put on virtue, knowledge, constancy, hope. Let no difficulties dishearten us, no terrors daunt us, no pressure of duty cause us to grow weary in well-doing. That good confession, which the blessed Master witnessed before Pontius Pilate, let us also be empowered from above to witness after Him! Though tried in the sevenfold heated furnace, may we come forth as gold, meet for the everlasting uses of the heavenly sanctuary.

6. But we do not yet reach the height of our Lord's language. Do we say, “Deliver us from the evil”? Say rather, as Christ would have us understand his words in

their depth and fulness, "Deliver us from the Evil One." The Scriptures know nothing of a doctrine, which, with a certain fashionable philosophy, is a much valued one—the doctrine of evil in the abstract. What is evil in the abstract? Will any one tell us what it is? From the beginning of human history, the Bible Revelation connects evil with the agency of a mysterious and terrible Being, who, for us at least, is the author of evil. Originally sinless he became sinful, and with him innumerable other beings, his inferiors and vassals. Now he is the king of the fallen angels, and the irreconcilable enemy of God and man. He ruined mankind in the beginning; and it is the occupation of his dark existence—so far as we can trace the secrets of it—to endeavour, in the case of each individual human soul, to bring about a repetition of the catastrophe of paradise. He is neither omnipresent nor almighty. But he goes about, now as "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," now as "that old serpent," deceiving men by his subtleties, and seducing them to their destruction. How he acts, whether as the lion or the serpent, we do not fully know. But he does act, and that mightily. He rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience. He is their god, and they worship him. And the servants of Christ, who have escaped out of his hands—these he seeks to recover to himself; and in no way more commonly or effectually than through the medium of that painful discipline of life, whereby God seeks to prepare them for their final inheritance and home. In some cases, indeed, the discipline seems to be directly under his hand. It was Satan, who bound the woman that had an infirmity near twoscore years. Satan desired to sift Peter and his fellow-apostles. An angel of Satan buffeted St. Paul in the matter of the

thorn in the flesh. So too this same evil being—St. John tells us—was to cast some of the Smyrniot Christians into prison. And in all cases, as it would seem, he can make use of Providential trial as an engine for accomplishing his malign purposes. He insinuates religious doubts. He causes flutter and agitation of soul. He brings deep shadows of gloom and despair over the spirit. He strangles in us the life of devotion. He plants invisible stumblingblocks in the way of our progress heavenward. He pours hemlock into the cup of God's fatherly chastisements; and with portentous fixedness of purpose, with illimitable versatility of resource, and with a giant strength and energy, such as omnipotence alone can curb, he strives to catch the godly in his nets, and to make them sharers of his own eternal guilt and doom. This is the evil of temptation, in the source and power of it, from which we must pray to be delivered—the cunning and malignant spite, the terrible potency and domination of that great apostate angel, in whose hands trial may easily work for us spiritual bane and downfall.

7. Therefore we are warned to pray, "Deliver us from the Evil One." A cry to God is put into our mouths, to match his might against that of the supernatural adversary. "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord"! We appeal to our Father in heaven to send Him to our help, who, when He was on earth as our Redeemer, kept the principalities and powers at bay, making a show of them openly in his cross, and who is now at the right hand of God, waiting till his enemies become his footstool. The tried soul of the believer, tried by the Wicked One, Divinely bidden, asks that the forces of the kingdom of Christ, in full array, may be set front to front with those of the enemy and avenger, and that Satan may be bruised under

his feet shortly. This is the spirit and significance of the petition. If trial is to leave us unscathed, we must be protected from the Evil One, whose works it was the very object of the Lord's incarnation to nullify and abolish. And we pray accordingly—The Son of God, our Saviour Jesus Christ, come to the help of our ignorance, and give us a right understanding in all things ! The blood of the everlasting covenant cleanse us from an evil conscience ! The Divine Comforter Himself dwell in our hearts by faith, and endue us with the courage of a perfect peace ! That great Shepherd of the sheep snatch us out of the jaws of the wolf, and guide us safely to the green pastures of the invisible Canaan ! When thine enemy, O Christ, thine enemy of the wilderness and the tree, breaks in as a flood upon thy tempted disciple, lift Thou up a standard against him, and keep unto eternal salvation the soul, for which Thou didst lay down thine own most precious life.

8. So each several servant of Christ is to pray for himself. But not for himself alone. The individual here is the representative of the brotherhood of faith, and his prayer is to gather up the common necessity of all the children of God. If the individual is liable to trial, the same afflictions are accomplished in his brethren that are in the world. If he is in danger from the evil, so are they also. And in view of the want of the whole militant church, and in lively sympathy with it, Christ would have us pray—what we have much need to pray both now and ever—“Lead *us* not into temptation, but deliver *us* from evil.”

9. Need we add, that this is prayer which God will answer ? Doubtless, in innumerable instances, He spares his praying servants affliction, which otherwise would fall upon them. He saves them from the hour and power of

darkness. And if it be not so, and if the cup of trial, notwithstanding the prayer which asks that it may pass away, be put to our lips, there is always the strengthening angel, and always salvation from the Evil One, for those who truly seek it.

10. Indeed beyond all the good, which we commonly discern as guaranteed by the language of the text, God will by and by fulfil the promise of it to his faithful people. For yet a little while, and the petition of the individual saint, "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil," shall be answered—it may be in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye—by the beatific vision. And again a little while, and the weary church shall have accomplished its warfare; and the bells of heaven shall ring out God's great victory over all his enemies; and the joyful procession of holy souls of mankind, for ever out of reach of the evil, shall go into the joy of their Lord.

Shall we not end with this end? What is there beyond it? Our hopes can rise no higher; neither can our prayers. But in view of the blessed consummation, and in preparation for it:

1. *Let us recognise the dangers, amidst which we are called to prosecute our Christian course.* We are exposed to evil. We are within range of the power of the Evil One. Let us be mindful of this. Let us realise it. We do not contend simply with unholy tendencies, influences, and examples, with the bias of our nature, or the spirit of the age. Our contention is with an unutterably mighty, sagacious, and pitiless being, who seeks our ruin; who will never falter in the effort to secure it, as long as our mortal life continues; and whom God alone can enable us to resist and conquer. Remember—fools laugh at Satan; and wise

men do unwisely when they jest concerning him. He sorely buffeted the incarnate Lord of Glory. Let us, who seek to do the will of our Father in heaven, take heed that we enter not into temptation.

2. *Let us mark where our strength lies, as the servants of God.* It is a pulpit commonplace, but none the less true or important—our strength is in Prayer. If Christian fidelity were mere matter of intelligence, foresight, and precaution, if moral courage and energy were all that was needed to enable us to cope with the evil of our nature and circumstances, we might very well rely upon ourselves, and might dispense with assistance from without. And there are those who teach this as a doctrine, and who contend that the cry of the soul for supernatural help is an impertinence and an error. Alas! the conditions of the case are wholly mistaken, where such a sentiment obtains. If it is not denied, it is strangely overlooked, that, according to the Scriptures, human wisdom and strength are as nothing in competition with the subtlety and might of those unseen forces of evil, in face of which Christians must accomplish the tasks of life, and that, in fact, alliance with God by prayer, and the aid of his omnipotence, are indispensable, if we are ever to win the crown of righteousness. Very significant is the collocation of the text with the words which follow it in our Bibles. “Deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.” This language, indeed, may be simply the voice of the primitive church, speaking forth its feeling and faith in magnificent unison with the oracle from heaven. But even granting this, we find in it a sure echo of the entire Word of inspiration; and standing where it does, it reminds us, with equal truth and impressiveness, that the power by which sinful,

tempted men can do the will of God is lodged in the heavens, and that prayer alone can furnish them with the equipments necessary to everlasting salvation. And in times like the present, when prayer is denied to have any efficacy, it is of more consequence than usual for Christians to keep it clearly before them, that, the Bible being witness, they can only "resist" the great "adversary, the devil," by "drawing near to God"; that all purely human resources, as against the tremendous hostility of the invisible kingdom of evil, are but vapour and chaff; and that the reality, progress, and eventual perfecting of the life of God in the soul of man are bound up essentially with the practical recognition of the grace and duty of prayer.

3. *Last of all—let us adore the Great and Glorious Author of our Being, our Earthly Estate, and our Immortal Hopes.* How evil could ever be allowed to intrude upon the sanctity of the universe; how angels of light could become angels of darkness; how an invisible empire of sin should usurp among the creatures the rights and prerogatives of God; how the Wicked One should be able to exercise the dire authority, which he does, over the human soul; how it can be permitted, that a Divine discipline should, in the hands of Satan, transmute itself, times without number, into an appalling curse—all these are problems, which the text directly or remotely raises; and they are problems which, as we said in the outset, are for us insoluble. But then the solution of them is no part of our business. God will see to it, that the problems are solved in their season. Enough for us, that we recognise and accommodate ourselves to our providential lot, and to the just demands which God makes upon our dutiful love and obedience. Whatever moral puzzles may exist

around us, one thing is certain—God calls us, by his suffering Son Jesus Christ our Lord, to his everlasting kingdom and glory, and has made all necessary provision for our present and eternal peace. We are fallen : there is a Redeemer. We are guilty : there is an infinitely meritorious sacrifice. The image of God is defaced in us : the Spirit of holiness is prepared to make all things new. The Evil One desires to have us, that he may gloat over our moral miscarriage. Prayer is made for us continually by a Divine Intercessor at the right hand of God. “The world and the flesh and the devil” stand between us and everlasting life. We have the promise of Christ Himself to all faithful souls—“Ye shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of my Father’s hand.” Therefore let us be strong and of a good courage ; and, lifting up our hearts to God with one accord, let us say—“Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour—wise, as in all his dispensations, so also in the ordinance of trial—be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.”

PREROGATIVES OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP.

“BEHOLD, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”—1 JOHN iii. 1—3.

THREE facts belonging to the Christian life, as it is or shall be, present themselves in this Scripture. A fact of Experience—this is the first. A fact of Ignorance—this is the second. A fact of Faith—this is the third. We have, first:

I.

A Fact of Experience—“Now are we the sons of God.”

To disbelievers in the Bible revelation, or to those who, professing to accept this revelation, yet believe in but a fraction of it, the apostle's words will be a truism. Children of God! All men are children of God. Did not one Father make us? God's paternal love—it is the birthright, and the sure and inalienable heritage of mankind for ever.

Such is not St. John's teaching. As he represents, there are those of mankind, who have nothing to do with the fatherly love of God, who, so far from this, are, in an awful yet most real and definable sense, the offspring and

property of the Wicked One. "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God." "Whosoever committeth sin is of the devil." So that, when he says of the servants of Christ that they are God's sons, he does not babble a truism. He means, that in respects, in which the affirmation will not hold of others of mankind, in which it is absolutely false as made concerning great numbers of our race, in which, indeed, at one time, it was not even true of themselves—in the largest, noblest, and most sacred application of the term, Christians are children of God.

But the apostle does not affirm merely: he explains. Christ's disciples—his genuine and faithful disciples—are God's children, because:

1. *They are the objects, in the strict and proper sense of the term, of the parental love of God*—a love, which does not spring out of the natural relationship subsisting between God and man, but which God has conferred upon them as a grace and benefit. In other words, they have received that distinguishing blessing of the Gospel economy, of which the New Testament has so much to say—"the adoption of sons" into the holy family of God; and so they enjoy the approving, complacent love of their Father in heaven, love immeasurably higher in degree, indeed, but yet in kind like that, which a human parent has for the child in whom his soul delights. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath given unto us, that we should be called the children of God."

Again—Christians are sons of God, because:

2. *They are the subjects of a Divine Regeneration.* St. John, in common with the other inspired writers, holds that human nature, by reason of the fall, is bad, and that it can only become good by a second and super-

natural birth. And Christians, as he represents, have all undergone the process of the miracle. Throughout the Epistle they are spoken of repeatedly as “born” or “begotten of God.” Indeed we cannot conceive a human soul to be, strictly speaking, the object of the paternal love of God, which is not also partaker of his holiness. We can conceive of a love, which shall pity us in our spiritual ruin and apostacy. We can conceive of a love, which shall see us coming home from the far country, and shall run forth to meet and welcome us. Thank God, there is such a love in Him, the cross and the personal history of countless thousands of mankind being witness! But we must be regenerate after the image of God, if we are to enjoy the very reality and plenitude of his love. And the grace of the adoption is a grace which regenerates. Mark how the two interlock one another in a wellknown passage in the Gospel of St. John. “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them which believe in his name . . . which were born . . . of God.” And the Epistle teaches the same doctrine. The spirit of God enters into every one whom God adopts as his child, and so—to use the wonderful language of the apostle—“God dwelleth in him, and he in God.”

Once more—Christians are God’s children, inasmuch as :

3. *They have received Christ by a true and living faith.* The ground of their sonship—not the meritorious, but the conditional ground—lies in the fact, that, unlike their fellow men, who do not know God, or knowing Him do not obey the Gospel, they have believed in Christ. They have believed in Him as the sworn and eternal enemy of sin and worldliness, and they have ceased to do evil. They have believed in Him as the very Son of God,

manifested to take away sin—by the blood of his cross making propitiation for it; by the grace of his Spirit abolishing the dominion and poisonous energy of it in the soul: and so, in accordance with the Divine provisions of redemption, they have received at once the adoption and the spiritual regeneration of God's true children. "Ye are all the children of God," writes St. Paul to the Galatians, "by faith which is in Christ Jesus." And St. John at once reiterates his teaching, and supplements it. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

In all these senses and respects—the apostle would have his readers understand—Christ's disciples are children of God. At the same time, for the present, he suggests, the sonship is, to a certain extent, masked and disguised.

The dispensations of Providence, nay, the very constitution of human nature and the world they live in, throw a veil upon it. The princes go about in rags, and have no certain dwellingplace. Sometimes they scarcely recognise themselves; and like their Master, they go to that which is their own, and they that are their own do not accept them. Not seldom, indeed—apart from all defect of moral vision—it is not easy to pierce the garb, under which some even of God's truest children move across the stage of this mortal life.

And, where Providence creates no difficulty, the sons of God are, and must of necessity be, hidden from the eyes of such of mankind as are not his children. However plain the tokens of the sonship may be, they will not be distinguished by those whom St. John here calls "the world." The world did not know Christ: and on this very account—that is precisely how the apostle puts it—it does not know his disciples. "Therefore the world

knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." Wicked men, earth-worshipping, self-pleasing men, men who have never sought God—what possible comprehension can they have of the experiences, feelings, motives, aspirations of the children of God? What conceivable sympathy can there be between them? The very language of spiritual men is a jargon to the world; and their life is set down at best as an impenetrable mystery or a pitiable madness. Thus it has been, that all down the ages and generations, a living Christianity has been misinterpreted, caricatured, and treated with indignity by the bulk of mankind. Nor need we go to the past for illustration. Even among ourselves, so complete is men's spiritual blindness, where the finger of God has not touched the interior eye, that the profession of any sonship to God, beyond that which is involved in our natural relation to Him, is very commonly scouted as a fantastical delusion, if not as a deliberate and odious imposture.

The sonship, however, is none the less a reality; for—as St. John describes:

1. There is a Divine Attestation of the fact. Earth may not call things by their proper names. Heaven always does. In heaven, "child of God" is the style and title of every disciple of the Crucified. And the voice, which there speaks loud and clear, has its echo upon earth; for to every servant of his Son God gives this token of his love—"His Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." "He that believeth on the Son," St. John assures us, "hath the witness in himself."

2. There is the Consciousness of a Spiritual State, which implies the sonship. Is knowledge of God an attribute of sonship with Him? Hear the apostle. "The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding,

that we may know Him that is true ; and we are in Him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." Do the sons of God love Him? "We love Him"—St. John continues—"because He first loved us." Do they love one another? A third time the holy oracle replies—"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." So, as matter of blessed consciousness, the whole spiritual nature of Christ's people is transformed into the likeness of Him whose children they are.

3. At the same time, the reality of the sonship is certified, in sight both of heaven and earth, by a corresponding Temper and Life. Men may not discern the features of the Divine relationship ; but they are there to be discerned. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." Here is the negative sign. And there is the positive likewise. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." And again : "we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." And so, by a universal abstinence from evil, by an habitual resistance to the spirit of worldliness, and by a faithful imitation of the piety and charity of Christ, Christ's disciples are, and prove themselves to be, the sons of God. And this is that Fact of Experience, to which St. John, in the text, calls the attention of the Church of God.

The apostle's language, however, brings into view another feature of the life of Christ's servants on earth. He describes it as connected with :

II.

A Fact of Ignorance—"It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

When we speak of ignorance, we do not always mean

a want of knowledge, which is absolute and unqualified. There is an ignorance, both intellectual and spiritual, which supposes large and most precious knowledge. And such is the ignorance of the sons of God, referred to in the text. We do not know what we shall be, when this present estate of our sonship shall have vanished away like a dream. That is how the apostle expresses the fact of our ignorance. And as we see, the very terms of it are an affirmation of knowledge in the children of God, which transcends all human wisdom, and has a measureless value for every one of us.

In the first place our ignorance implies the knowledge, that, when we die, we shall not die. It does not dawn upon the apostle, that the termination of the life of the godly might be the cessation of their existence. On the contrary, what with unevangelised human nature is at best a conjecture and a hope, is a first principle and axiom of the Christian revelation. Our very ignorance of the future contains the assurance that “we” shall be, and shall be for ever.

And secondly, our ignorance notwithstanding, death, we know, will not sunder the bond of the sonship. The children of God will exist hereafter ; they will never cease to exist : and their life will be eternally that of the sons of God. The unfathomable future will bring no alteration in this respect. “God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life.” “The world passeth away, and the desire thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” Whatever is essential to the relation of sons—knowledge, felicity, love, holiness, obedience, worship, service—all this will remain, and never pass away.

But what we shall be hereafter in the mode and condi-

tions of our sonship, we do not know. And this is that Fact of Ignorance, to which the apostle here adverts. We know that we shall be ; we know that we shall still be sons : we do not know what we shall be as sons.

There is, indeed, a science, falsely bearing the name, which affects to be free of this ignorance. Men may be found, who profess to have commerce with the unseen world, and to be capable of defining its phenomena, and of expounding the laws which underlie them. They enjoy an easy familiarity with the experiences, states, and occupations of disembodied human souls, as if the celestial gates stood always ajar for them to gaze through, or as if heaven were already come to be their settled home. This is not simple grotesqueness and folly. It is an unhallowed prying into things beyond us, a busy idleness of men, whom St. Paul shall characterise, not we—"men vainly puffed up in their fleshly minds."

We do not know what we shall be. Do we know? What it will be to exist without the body, to see, and feel, and act, without corporeal organs—do we know that? Our relations to God, what they will be ; how we shall discern Him, what mode of communication we shall have with Him, under what form we shall render Him our adoration and praises, the manner in which we shall be called upon to execute his will—how much do we know of all this? And the great family of God, as we shall find it beyond the grave ; and the evolution through the eras, in sight of the principalities and powers in heaven, and not without their aid and concurrence, of the wondrous scheme of human redemption ; and the final constitution of the moral government of God, if there be a final constitution ; and the unwritten history of the eternal ages—who of the sons of God, here upon earth, knows how his personal life

and experience will stand towards these sublime realities? We do not know what we shall be.

And there are two very obvious reasons for our ignorance. In the first place, by Divine ordination we are incapable of apprehending the heavenly things. Our eyes are "holden," that we cannot see them. They are too lofty for us. They baffle and elude our ken. At best we catch but faint and ruffled glimpses of them, as they show darkly in the glass of sense, of reason, and of faith. Besides, many of these realities are not realities at present; nor will they be until the time appointed by the Father, a time, in the case of some of them, possibly so distant, that He alone can reckon it, to whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." To say all in a word—the future character and conditions of the Christian sonship are, and must of necessity be, unknown to us, because Christ, who is at once the centre and circumference of his people's being, is not yet "manifested."

As things now are, Christ does not appear. His person is invisible. The method and processes of his sacerdotal intercession at the right hand of God are hidden from our view. And though many crowns are on his head, and He reigns as king for ever, his authority does not assert itself in an absolute reduction of all things to his sway. Enemies infest his consecrated dominion, and his servants suffer disability, privation, and wrong. Altogether, his mediatorial relationship to us subsists under disguise. There is suppression, reserve, concealment. He is not patently and conspicuously that awful, holy, loving Christ, before whom, if the curtain were drawn, not a shadow of evil could hold its ground for an instant, or a child of God fail to be completely and for ever blessed. And as long

as the mystery of the non-manifestation continues, so long it must remain a secret to the sons of God, what they shall by and by be, when their life is perfected.

But this second fact of the text, the fact of the Church's Ignorance, is coupled with :

III.

A Fact of Faith—"We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

This third and last of the apostle's facts, like those before it, is not a single one. Two particulars at least are included. First, Christ will hereafter be manifested. And, secondly, the manifestation will be such that his people will partake of it.

The Bible speaks of a manifestation of Christ, which follows immediately upon the mortal dissolution of the godly. The wrappings of flesh and of earth being stripped off, they are "present with the Lord." The mystery of Christ is unsealed. They behold Him as He is—in the splendours of his glorified humanity, in the marvellous functions of his office as the high priest of the heavenly tabernacle, in the wisdom, rectitude, and grace of his Divine dominion, and in all the bliss and purity of that second paradise, where He is as the tree of life to the nations. So Christ is manifested. And obscurity gone, and suffering, and evil, all gone that perplexed and dragged the earthly sonship, the former things, for these liberated sons of the kingdom, being now as if they were not, the revelation of Christ, is the revelation of themselves; and what He is, in the glorious character and conditions of his being, so far as is possible in the state of separate souls, they are also.

The Scriptures, however, do not dwell with any particularity or explicitness upon this manifestation of Christ, the manifestation, that is to say, which every child of God enjoys, as soon as he is freed from the bondage of the flesh. There is another, and far more glorious manifestation, of which they have much to say; one which so much transcends the revelation of paradise, that this latter, to the thought of the sacred writers, not seldom, as in the text, has "no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth." And it is to this that St. John points in the text—the manifestation, which is by and by to consummate, not the individual life of believers, but the collective life of the whole Church of God. When the Gospel has been preached to all nations; when the great conflict between good and evil has waged itself out to its last issues; when the objects contemplated by the mediatorial priesthood and kingship of Christ have all been overtaken; then, on a sudden, to the view, not of a section of the household of God, but of the entire congregation and brotherhood of its members in earth and heaven, Christ shall be manifested: and his servants, seeing Him, shall be for ever, in all the dimensions and fulness of their creature capacity, made like unto Him. "We shall be like Him," says the apostle, "for we shall see Him as He is."

The meaning of these words has often been unduly narrowed, not to say mistaken. We shall be like Christ, in the last day, it has been explained, because the glory of his Person, then for the first time fully exhibited, will transfuse itself into the being of his saints; and that wondrous Image of the Father, now no longer under veil, shall change the resurrection bodies of the blessed ones that see it into its own ineffable likeness. A beautiful and striking thought, and not without its element of truth.

But it does injustice to the apostle's doctrine, both as to the manifestation of Christ Himself, and as to the mode and nature of the benefit, which the manifestation will confer upon the Church.

The appearing of Christ in the end of the ages will not be simply the display of the brightness and majesty of his Person. It will be that; for He will appear "in his own glory, and in that of the Father and of the holy angels." But it will be much more than that. It will be the awful outblaze of his rectoral righteousness, in the final avenging of the quarrel of God with evil doers, and in the purging out from his kingdom of all things that offend and of them that do iniquity. For "He shall be revealed from heaven," says St. Paul, "with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," the very heavens and earth, as St. John declares, fleeing away, because sin has soiled them, before the dreadful epiphany of the offended Judge. This will be the manifestation in its first great act. And the second and final act shall follow straightway. For rebellion and evil being banished for ever into their own dark prisonhouse, Christ shall be manifested as the builder and central sun of a new world of purity and joy, a world, of which his people shall be the blessed inhabitants, and where, unlike the transgressors, who shall see Christ's face no more, the children of God shall see him—for what but He shall then remain to be seen?—now truly as He is, as well in the magnificence of his estate as in that of his person; and seeing Him, they shall, by virtue of the grace, partake with Him for ever in his royal glory, their own state and condition becoming and eternally continuing to be the state and condition of their manifested Lord. In this

highest, fullest sense, the manifestation of Christ in the last day shall be "the apocalypse," as St. Paul expresses it, "of the sons of God;" they themselves, for the first time, being truly revealed either to themselves, or to the universe of the creatures, when "the Lord shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

What this participation in Christ may imply, we can only faintly imagine. Our risen or transfigured bodies made "like unto his glorious body!" Our spiritual nature lifted up, refined, and sanctified after the pattern of the heavenly. Our circumstances, associations, and employments all such, for dignity and bliss, as it hath not entered into human heart to conceive! It is in vain we strive to compass a worthy apprehension of it. The golden city and the living water, the radiant vestures and the triumphal palms, the choir without number and the grand Te Deum, the tearless eyes and the rapturous friendship, the tranquil rest and the open face of God—Divine symbols and suggestions all of them: but they leave us an unmeasured distance short of the still unknown reality. Here our very knowledge has its ignorance, just as, a while since, we saw our ignorance had its knowledge. Only this we know—by the promise of God we know it, and by the earnest of the heavenly joy already in our hearts we know—that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory."

The practical lessons of the passage lie upon the surface of it; some of them are expressly marked by the apostle. Three, at least, cannot be overlooked.

1. *Do honour to the Love, which has conferred the sonship.* We were enemies; we were aliens; we were

servants ; we were minors. Now we are very sons. God has made us living members of the household, on behalf of which Christ died. He has stamped us as his own with the signature of his regenerating Spirit. We have fellowship with Him, even as the Son Himself has fellowship with the Father. We are occupied, in holy confederation with the angels, in the august and happy service of God. Our interests are watched over by the unsleeping eye of Him, who dwells between the cherubim. Irreconceivable as is the dignity, we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Congratulate one another. Humbly but most joyfully congratulate yourselves. Above all, never cease to lift up the hands of your heart towards heaven in grateful admiration, and to say by word and deed—O Lord, what manner of love is this, which Thou hast showed us, in that we are called children of God !

2. *Make a right account of the temporary Ignorance, which attaches to the sonship.* It is not an accident. Neither is it an arbitrary dispensation of the will of God. It has a meaning and a purpose. It would not be good for us to know ; otherwise we should know. Without the ignorance, there would be no scope for the exercise of faith ; and faith is the cardinal principle, according to which the life of Christian sonship must be framed and regulated. It is God's plan, that fidelity to Him in the dark shall be the condition of our everlasting advancement to a place among the sons of the daylight. Therefore let us not behave ourselves fretfully and impatiently under the ignorance, as though some unaccountable and morally indefensible action of Divine providence were brought to bear upon us. Let us beware also of indulging in curious speculations as to

the life of the future. Few habits of mind more surely take off the edge of the spirit of reverence, or are more fatal to a healthy and steady fulfilment of Christian duty. It is rebellion against the will which has appointed the ignorance, when men break through and endeavour to gaze upon the secrets, which God has compassed about with his own thick cloud. Make ready for the unknown life of the world to come by diligent continuance in the well-doing of the life that now is. Let the sonship of time be a constant preparation, in trust, in submission, in service, in patience, in most joyful hope, for the higher sonship of eternity. This is the proper significance and right application of the mysterious economy of the ignorance.

3. *Be mindful to cultivate the Purity, which the apostle affirms to be essential to the sonship.* You are the children of God, anticipating an unknown and yet a known and eternal heaven. You know, that the blessed, holy Christ will by and by appear, and that his appearing will be your own appearing, before angels and men, unto praise and honour and glory: you have this hope in you. Then you will purify yourselves; you will do this with a purity, which has its model and standard in Christ. Every one so does, who has the hope, of which He is the object. The hope is at best a delusion, where this is not the case. Either it never existed, or it has vanished away. See that you possess and cultivate the spiritual chastity of the truly Christian character. Have no commerce with the evil. Refuse to follow the vain course of this world, its projects, its occupations, its amusements. Separate yourselves, in the spirit of a lowly and reverent self-consecration, to the glory of God and the good of man. Live a life of thoughtfulness, prayer, and worship.

Fill your hands with works of charity, for Christ's name sake. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things," and let them become your own. As Christ was pure, when He was here among men; as He is now pure, at the right hand of the Majesty on high; as He will be pure, when He comes with clouds; so let us, who profess to be children of God, be likewise pure in all manner of conversation. Then, not otherwise indeed, but then—O unimagined, unimaginable blessedness!—"when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

PASSING AWAY OF THE WORLD.

“LOVE not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof : but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”—1 JOHN ii. 15—17.

WORLDLINESS, in the Scripture sense of the term, has always been the sin and temptation of the Church of God. In fact, it is the sin and temptation of man. And our own times are by no means free from the guilt and peril of it. Many discerning men are of opinion, that, while wickedness and vice—the more flagrant forms of worldliness, that is to say—are on the decrease among us, certain other kinds, under favour of circumstances, multiply, and grow more and more active. Be this as it may, no one can deny, that, in this Christian land and age, the thoughts and aims of multitudes are wholly limited by things visible and present. Rank, position, enjoyment—these are, with them, the ends of life. To please themselves is the master idea, and all besides is sacrificed to it.

It is eminently timely, therefore, to remind one another of the relations, which worldliness holds towards Christ and the Gospel. And we cannot do this better than under the light of the text, which is a solemn apostolic caution against worldliness—“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world”—founded upon the

double consideration: first, that worldliness is incompatible with religion—"If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him"—and secondly, that the world is a mockery and a thing of nought—"The world passeth away, and the desire thereof."

I.

We shall not be in danger of supposing, that St. John here brands creation and providence as evil. This is the blasphemy of a certain kind of science falsely so called, and of the Papal and other Antichrists. The natural world—it is the handiwork of the Infinitely Pure and Holy One. The things that are in it—they are the Divinely constructed furniture of man's habitation, and the Divinely appointed instruments or conditions of his life and well-being. And not only are not the world and its contents, as God has ordained them, evil; they are legitimate objects of interest to us, and within certain limits they merit and even claim our affection. Touch not; taste not; handle not; search not; think not; love not—this may be the voice of philosophical fanaticism, or of priestly arrogance: it is not the voice of Christ. Christ puts no anathema upon the creature. Christ never prisons the intellect, or gags the reason. He tramples no human instinct or sympathy under foot. The pleasures of sense or of mind; the occupations and activities of business; friendship, home, the knitting together of heart and heart—where does the Gospel proscribe or disparage any of these, as such? A man may eat and drink; he may devote himself to science or art; he may buy, and sell, and get honest gain; he may act his part as a father, a householder, a citizen, a member of the body politic, and not only may not sin, but contrariwise he may do all

to the glory of God, and, as matter of fact, may glorify God in all. So the Scriptures everywhere teach : hence, with the text before us, which at first sight seems to teach otherwise, we must distinguish.

The truth is, when the apostle speaks of the world and the things in it, he uses the peculiar dialect of Scripture. He does not mean simply the material universe, the earth, mankind and their natural state and condition, the relations of life, and the like. These are included in his meaning ; but they are by no means the centre and total of it. According to the apostle, according to Christ and the Bible, the whole platform and sphere of human existence—the world and the things which appertain to it—have fallen under the power of the invisible, all but omnipotent Spirit of Evil, who, for this reason, is spoken of in Scripture as “the Prince of this World.” Through his agency every element and condition of our life on earth is mysteriously linked with evil. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, belonging to this world, however pure or lofty or sacred in itself, which the Evil Being cannot, which he does not, use as an occasion and engine of war against God, and of spiritual hurt and damage to mankind. The works of God, the general order of Providence, individual circumstances, are so dealt with and manœuvred by him whom we call Satan, as to constitute a portentous enchantment, whereby he practises upon men—shutting out of their sight, or at least obscuring, the eternal realities ; diverting their attention to trifles ; and, through the medium of their corrupt inclination and will, seducing them into numberless paths of self-idolatry and evil-doing.

It is not our business now to inquire how all this has come about, still less to attempt to vindicate the Divine wisdom and goodness, as working in so dark a mystery.

But according to the Scriptures, such is the fact : and by “the world and the things that are in the world,” against which St. John here cautions us, we are to understand the entire fabric and course of human life, as they have been taken possession of by the Potentate of Evil, and as they are employed by him to the dishonour of God in the degradation, corruption, and ruin of the souls of men.

The apostle’s illustrations furnish at once the key to his meaning and the material of our meditations. The worldly things, of which we are to beware, are “the desire of the flesh”—that is to say, of our natural or fleshly mind ; “the desire of the eyes”—in other language, of the senses ; the eye, the lordly sense, being put for the entire number ; “the pride,” or, what is the same thing, the parade and blazonry “of life” : all those material and earthly objects—the apostle intimates—whether absolute or relative, whether in kind or in degree, which the unregenerate nature of man affects, and in which those who follow the dictates of nature, “the men of the world,” as both Testaments style them, live, move, and have their being.

We are so constituted and circumstanced, that, if we will, we may give ourselves up to self-pleasing. Ignoring the claims of God, and of the world to come ; leaving mankind and society to make their way, as they best can, out of the abyss of darkness into which sin has plunged them ; protecting ourselves scrupulously from all demands upon personal self-denial and self-sacrifice ; we may occupy life in the pursuit of the objects, which naturally gratify us. The world affords the means and opportunity of so doing. Under some form or other, as by indolence, vanity, ambition, money-loving, we may render homage to our fleshly inclinations and will. Many do this. So

far as possible, they do nothing besides. As St. Paul expresses it, they "live after the flesh." The flesh is the mainspring and animating principle of their being. It is their god.

Again, we are surrounded by objects, which court the senses, and through the senses address themselves to the imagination, the feelings, the will. Worldly desire is very commonly the child of the senses; the visible, tangible, and material forming the domain, within which it finds its scope and satisfaction. And, as the world now is, nothing is easier, nothing is more usual, than for the senses, bewitched and fascinated by the Wicked One, to become to us ministers of impurity, covetousness, and of all manner of base and unhallowed affections.

Indeed the conditions of human life are such, that, unless we be well on our guard, we shall without fail spend our days in an illusion, and end them like those who have acted a part in a vain show. The supreme realities of life—obligation to God, moral responsibility, the claims of piety and charity—these, by the spell of the Evil Spirit, and the sad consent of man's unholy will, as matter of common experience, fall into the background of human life; and, instead of them, a world of pretence and mockery surrounds us. At every turn we find ourselves confronted by things, which are not, and which yet assume to be. The near seems distant, and the distant near. The great dwindles down into the semblance of the little, and the little swells out into the dimension of the great. Evil smiles, precisely as if it were good; and good frowns, as though it were surely evil. Distinction, wealth, and pleasure flaunt themselves before our eyes as the divinities of the occasion. We are dazzled with pomps, and triumphs, and gewgaws. Fashion and custom prescribe our beha-

viour, and make us their slaves. So men live, not in agreement with the Divine constitution of things and the known will of God, but according to the course of this world, as ruled and determined by God's great enemy and ours.

We are not to love the world, either in whole or part, as thus appropriated, tricked out, and turned into an organ of evil by the destroyer. Love it not, says the apostle. Let it not win your admiration, or enlist your sympathy. Let not your heart go forth towards it. Let it not give shape or direction to your life. It will be natural to you to love it. You will be mightily tempted to do so. Inclination, ostensible interest, general example, the apparent reason of things, will all urge you to this. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."

II.

To those who believe in the Divine authority of the Bible, an emphatic and solemn instruction, such as this, delivered by an apostle of Jesus Christ, would be a sufficient guide of life, apart from any reasons, which might be alleged in support of it. God is not bound to give us his reasons; and as matter of fact, He often withholds them. He does this in nature and providence; and He does it in Scripture likewise. We have the command; but there are no reasons assigned for it. And, in truth, the heart that is loyal to God will never be clamorous for reasons: it will be content to obey, and to wait. Sometimes, however, in condescension to our infirmity, or in mercy towards our sinfulness, God adds his reasons. In the text two reasons are furnished, why the world should not be loved.

1. *The Love of the World is incompatible with Religion.*

The objects, against the love of which we are cautioned, "are not of the Father." God, the great author of the creation and parent of human souls, who has ordained for all men the conditions of their being, and loves all with an illimitable love, who knows precisely what is in harmony with his procedure, what is in discord, what is for the good of the creatures, what is to their detriment—has nothing to do with these worldly things. They do not proceed from Him. They have no participation in his nature. He does not countersign or recognise them. They are entirely foreign and alien from his arrangements, will, and purposes.

So far from being "of the Father," they are "of the world." They spring out of that adulterate, debased, and evil order of things, which has come of the stratagems and conquests of the devil. They are the outgrowth of the moral darkness, disorder, and illusion, which, here upon earth, through man's sin, have taken the place of the primeval light and purity. They share in the corruption, whose progeny they are, and are themselves "earthly, sensual, devilish."

So that, by the very nature and necessity of things, the love of the world is not only something separate and apart from that "love of the Father," which is the very essence and life of religion ; it is inconsistent with it, it is opposed to it, it bars and excludes it.

Must it not be so ? To have the love of the Father, is to know God as sending his Son into the world to destroy the works of the devil, and as reconciling our guilty race to Himself through his cross. It is to obtain a personal acceptance with God, in the forgiveness of the sins which we committed as children of the Evil One. It is to receive

the Holy Ghost, as the Spirit of adoption, into our hearts. It is to be rescued from the tyrannous power of darkness, and to become subjects of the kingdom of God's dear Son. It is to deny ungodliness and worldly desire—the very ministry of Satan—and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world. It is to crucify the flesh with its lusts. It is to seek not our own things, but the things which are Jesus Christ's. It is to belong to the citizenship of heaven, and from that consecrated circle of life and activity to look for the coming of the Lord, as the abolisher of evil, and the restorer of all things. It is, in a word, to break away utterly from “this present evil world” and its god, and to do in all things the holy and just and good commandments of our Father in heaven.

Now all this is the precise antithesis of worldliness. Worldliness honours the flesh, godliness the spirit. Worldliness fastens its eye on material and earthly things; godliness looks with steadfast gaze towards those which are eternal. Worldliness passes its days in a juggle of semblance and falsehood; godliness, the child of truth and reality, God's child, walks with sure foot in the way everlasting. Alike in principle, spirit, conduct, aim, they that are “of the world,” and they that are “of the Father,” are absolutely and irreconcilably contrary to one another. Has light any fellowship with darkness, or Christ with Belial? So neither can the children of the flesh be in concord with those of the Spirit. How is it conceivable, that a licentious man, or an extortioner, or one who leads a gay and frivolous life, should have any part in the kingdom of Christ and of God?

To love the world—this is at once the theological and practical position of the apostle—is to forego and abjure the love of the Father, with all that is involved and

carried by it. The Christian service and the Christian recompense are both alike renounced by him who loves the world. Therefore, St. John says—says virtually—if you would love God, doing his all-blessed will; if you would lead the self-denying, prayerful, holy life, which Christ led; if you would be wise, and pure, and happy; if you would bear about with you God's peace, that pearl of great price; if you would live, when you are dead, in the fruits and results of the good which you did upon the earth; if you would have light at eventide; if you would find, in the last day, that you had contributed something towards the final ascendancy of the kingdom of God; if you would for ever and ever inherit the rewards of righteousness—Love not the world nor the things which belong to it.

But a further reason for giving heed to the apostolic injunction is presented in the text.

2. *The World is Vanity.*

This argument is really contained in the former; for whatever, in St. John's sense of the expression, "is not of God," must of necessity be perishable, must of necessity perish. God, and that which is of God, alone has immortality. Other things may exist, and by Divine appointment may exist for ever. As matter of fact, some of them will. There will be for ever in the universe a place of evil, and it will be occupied for ever. So Christ declares. But all being is not true being. True being—real, desirable, dignified, happy, continuous, everlasting—that is the prerogative of God, and of the household and kingdom of God.

All else passes away. It is fleeting and temporary. It withers, decays, and gives up the ghost. And the things of the world, "the desire of the flesh, and the desire of the

eyes, and the pride of life," not being of the Father, but of the world, fall under this law of corruption. They are fugitive and evanescent. They all "pass away." The very world itself, of which they are the products, components, and appurtenances, passes away.

There is a passing away of the world, which is relative. Even within the limits of our natural existence on earth, the opportunity for attaining and enjoying material good is commonly short-lived. It comes, and it goes. The pleasures of sense, which we desire so eagerly; the occasions, which we may make use of, for the compassing of the ends of our pride or avarice; the periods, through which it is possible for us to figure on the stage of human affairs; are all, for the most part, restricted in their duration. Not seldom they continue but for a moment.

Quite as often, the capacity to gain the world ceases with men, though the opportunity remains. Infirmary, sickness, age, trouble—how effectually do they disable men from following their natural inclinations! How of the epicure, wrecked by paralysis? Where is the money-making, when the brain softens? What is the world to the man, whose children are in the graveyard? We may have boundless opportunities for the gratification of the flesh or of the mind; but we may be materially or morally incapacitated for availing ourselves of them, and so they may be to us as if they were not.

Then, sooner or later, death cuts men off without exception from all objects of purely natural and mundane desire. Sixty years hence—twenty—two—others may eat, drink, and be merry; and a coming generation may repeat the folly and madness of its predecessors. It will be nothing to us. We shall take no part in the grand masque and

domino of the world. The procession, and the music, and the lights, and the shouting of the crowd—for us they will have all passed away.

But this does not exhaust the apostle's meaning. He would have us understand, that

Absolutely the world, and all that belongs to it, as they subsist at present, will by and by pass away. The works of the devil lie under a divine sentence of doom. They are to perish.

The Scriptures encourage the hope of a universal ascendancy of the Gospel; and every step, which it makes in advance, reduces the power and narrows the jurisdiction of the world. The things lusted for by the flesh and the eye, the pomps and vanities which constitute the pride of life, diminish in number and wane in influence, as Christ's word and Spirit obtain more and more among men. So the world passes away, because the provocatives and instruments of worldliness become fewer and less potent. More than this—the heavens and earth, which now are, because they have served the Wicked One as the platform and theatre of his rebellion against God, and of his long and baleful tyranny over mankind, shall by and by be burned up by the judicial fire of the last day. Thus the very basis of worldliness, in the purpose and decree of God, is eventually to be broken up and abolished.

But not only so. These changes are but the symbols, heralds, and accompaniments of a far more tremendous catastrophe. The earth and the things that are therein are “reserved for fire,” not for their own sakes—God will not burn up the world, because He will burn it; they are “reserved against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” Do we say, the world is to pass away from the

men who have loved it? The men, who have loved the world, are to pass away with the world which they have loved. "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." This is the terminus of the apostle's meaning. When the kingdom of Satan is finally smitten; when Christ puts upon his head the last and brightest of his many crowns; when the elect are all safely housed within the consecrated walls of the city of God; when the hand of eternal justice has thrust all evil, whether of men or angels, into its own dark dungeon, and once and for ever has turned the key upon it; then, in the fullest and most absolute sense, shall be brought to pass that which is written in this Scripture, "The world passeth away, and the desire thereof."

And so—again the apostle must be understood to urge—"Love not the world." It is an imposture, a delusion, a sleight of hand, a vanity, a coloured bubble, a spider's web, a foundation of dust. To love the world is to seek felicity in that, which, at best, can only yield it in a low degree, and which always leaves a man a fool at the latter end. Whatever plea may be set up for worldliness, whatever advantages may be allowed incidentally to attach to it, it carries this legend, under God's own hand, and in characters easy to read—"It passeth away."

Not so godliness; for—as St. John would have us note—"the love of the Father" stands at the extremest pole of opposition to the love of the world in this respect also, that it does not pass away. The world passes away; "but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

There are philosophers who tell us, that matter is indestructible. How they know it, is not for us to say.

If they simply mean by the doctrine—as they sometimes do mean—that, so far as they know, it never is destroyed, we have no objection. But if they mean—as, we fear, is also sometimes the case—that matter is its maker's master, and, once made, cannot be got rid of, we do not believe a word of it. What God has made—if understanding and reason are worth anything—God can unmake. But however it may be with the physical world, there is an element in the universe which is indestructible. The love of God is that element. This never dies. And the child of Adam, in whom it is, by virtue of its presence in him, becomes thereby partaker of the Divine nature, shares in the ineffable blessedness of God, and lives eternally. The perturbations of ignorance do not disquiet him; for, as the apostle says in this Epistle, “he knows Him that was from the beginning.” The restlessness of guilt does not harass him; for, according to a second word of the apostle, “his sins are forgiven him for Christ's name's sake.” He is not, like the lovers of the world, led captive by the devil at his will; for, as the apostle speaks yet once more, “he is strong, and the word of God abideth in him, and he overcomes the Wicked One.” Whatever mutations may affect his state, he abides in faith, in peace, in sanctity, in hope, in God. And the passing away of the world, and its worshippers, and its king—it is the consummation of his being, for then in truth and verity “he abideth for ever.”

Thus then the apostle's caution stands forth to view under the burning lights of his own exposition. And surely we have need to mark it. We are all in danger of worldliness, under some or other of its diversified forms. We may be tempted to it in the grosser and more

obvious kinds. Let no man say, it is impossible I should be so tempted. Not improbably, in an eager and hurrying age like our own, we may find ourselves exposed to the peril of an undue absorption of our time and energies in merely worldly business—such absorption as shall drive religion within very narrow lines, and leave us little leisure or mental freshness for holy exercises, and for directly Christian work. More than all, perhaps, the infection of the spirit and habit of self-pleasing will be likely to put our spiritual life in jeopardy. On every side it seems to be passing now into a practical axiom among us, that the end of life is to extract as much personal gratification as possible out of it. And on this principle, rich and poor, young and old, male and female, make amusement, entertainment, and pleasure-taking their paramount interest. It is an evil omen for the future, as well as a fruitful source of mischief for the present ; and wise men will consider their doings.

Let us not forget it—"If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "He that committeth sin is of the devil." If the treasure is on earth—the highest authority teaches us—the heart will be there also. We cannot be lovers of pleasure, and lovers of God. Self-pleasing and Christ are contradictions in term. How, think you, would our men and women of fashion, the frequenters of our theatres and our promenades, treat the Man of the Cross, if He were still among us? The carpenter's son might preach long enough before He found them in his audience, except, indeed, as disdainful loungers or as cynical critics.

And so we are brought to the great and pressing question—Where is the remedy? How may we anticipate, how may we escape from the love of the world? St. John

suggests the answer. Let the love of the Father be in you. Here is at once the preventive and the safeguard. There is absolutely no other.

“The victory that overcometh the world” is “our faith.” Christian experience and Christian life—these are our salvation. “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” Choose God as your portion. Acquaint yourself with Him. Contritely and reverently seek his face in righteousness. Take hold on his mercy and strength through the satisfaction of the cross. Gaze with the open eyes of your intelligence and renovated spirit upon the face of God, until the evil and vanity of the world lose all charm for you. Walk humbly with God in secret devotion, in the worship of the church, and in all holy living. Make common cause with the godly of mankind. Cultivate the self-renouncing mind, which was in Christ. Act as if the fortunes of the gospel were committed to your single charge. Set before you the brevity of life, the nearness of eternity, the sure coming of the Judge. So, “keeping yourselves”—as St. Jude speaks—“in the love of God,” you will master the world; you will live and not die. And in the end of the times, when everything falls but God, and that which He accounts to be his own, you shall abide, and abide for ever.

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

THE LAMP IN THE DARK PLACE.

“WE have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”—2 PETER i. 19—21.

WE have here one of the rare instances, in which our noble English Version of Scripture is distinctly at fault. And the error is the more surprising, because it is so obvious.

As the passage stands, it makes St. Peter affirm, that there is something surer than that Divine witness to Christ, which he and two other apostles received, when the Lord was transfigured. The voice from heaven, heard upon “the holy mount” was sure. But there is, notwithstanding, that which is more certain still.

St. Peter can never have intended this. He did not intend it. What he really says is in effect, that that awful, blessed voice, together with the whole assemblage of circumstances amidst which it came, served but to ratify, confirm, and give new force to that of which he goes on to discourse.

And what this is, we gather without difficulty from the context. Plainly it is something, which Christians in general knew and were familiar with. Before the apostle wrote, they had it in possession: only now they had it with increased authority and certitude. As the following

verse shows, it is a writing to which St. Peter refers. Rather it is a writing of writings, writing so preeminent, that, in comparison with it, no other writing is worthy of the name. It is unique, and needs no definition beyond its simple title, Scripture. And this the Apostle would have his readers view, as belonging not so much to times then recent as to distant days of old, and as being especially the depository, organ, and vehicle of Divine revelation touching the future. Prophetic Scripture, itself the sure word of God, was made more sure by what Peter, James, and John witnessed on the mount of glory.

Going back a verse or two, we shall find the apostle recalling to the minds of the disciples what he and his colleagues had preached as the supreme doctrine of the Gospel—in some respects, at once its most awful and its most joyful doctrine—the second, glorious advent of the Lord Jesus. In thus preaching, he says, they had not followed cleverly constructed stories. They knew that they had not ; for he himself, in company with James and John, had by anticipation seen Him in his regal glory, and, amidst dazzling manifestations of the majesty of God, had heard God's very voice proclaiming Christ to be his own Son, and calling upon all men everywhere to hearken to Him. And so—he adds in the text—we have that ancient, oft-repeated, and ever-brightening word of Scripture Prophecy guaranteed to us by new vouchers, invested with new prerogatives, and commended to us, under fresh sanctions from heaven, as a lamp, which God has kindled, to show his servants the way to immortality.

The apostle's words are, in fact, an exhortation to Christians for ever, to mark and follow the supernatural teaching of Scripture as to the things which should come to pass in the last days.

For the present, he assumes, the servants of Christ are in the dark. Not that they are themselves dark. As St. Peter again and again teaches in this Epistle, they have the knowledge of God; they have God's peace in them through the righteousness of faith; they are purged from their sins by the blood of Christ; they are made free from the pollutions of the world, and share in the holy nature of God. There can be no darkness in a human soul having these experiences. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." this is the history in brief of every Christian.

But, though not of the dark, the darkness envelopes us. We are in a dark place. The sphere of our Christian life and service—shadow and obscurity fall upon it. And this is the case, both as respects the individual believer and the whole Church of God. It is nighttime with us.

Is it not so with the individual? How dim and perplexed, after all, is the knowledge which we have of God! We see: but it is through a glass darkly. And what is the known to the unknown? And if the mind is bewildered, how much more is the heart liable to unrest and disturbance! What seeming conflict obtains between God's declared character, and his actual dealings with us; between the illimitable goodness which broke forth in the mission of Christ on the one hand, and the conditions and experiences of our daily lot on the other! Our trust in God at once challenged and discouraged. The love which we owe to Him, and delight to cherish, startled, shocked, and all but paralysed by the events of life. Hope—the very hope which "maketh not ashamed"—times without number just at the point to die, because there seems nothing left to hope for. In other words, the

way of personal belief, obedience, and anticipation is dark ; perhaps sometimes very dark.

So of the whole church. "Christ loved it, and gave Himself for it." It is "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people." God is in the midst of it, as its protector and king. He who touches it touches the apple of the eye of God ; and his word is passed, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The church knows all this, knows it by innumerable tokens. Still there is darkness. The past is dark, the present dark, the future all dark. What a marvel of marvels, in view of God's natural and moral perfection, is the history of evil in the world—its origin, its progress, its ascendancy ! What a strain on faith, that Christianity should be the Divine system it is, and that today, near two thousand years after its birth, it is still a stripling, while the power of the Wicked One is a giant ! What an insoluble enigma—the prospect of difficulty, toil, and suffering, which lies before the church, as God's elect instrument for bringing the apostate world back to Him ! It is a dark place, in which the people of God are called to fulfil their errand and warfare on the earth.

But the darkness is not total. There is a light. We do not now speak of that secret illumination of the Spirit, which is given to every believer. Nor of the invisible presence of the Master in the church—a presence which is always a joyful daylight to its members, even when they walk through "valleys of shadow of death." These are not in the apostle's mind. Altogether apart from these, he points to another and external light, which God has lighted for his servants. Is the chamber dark ? There is a lamp in it. Is the way dark ? God puts into our hand a torch, which will save us from falling.

Scripture Prophecy is the Light. Centuries before St. Peter wrote, God gave mankind a Bible. He caused a number of documents to be written, at different times and by different hands, for the learning, first, of the ages which produced them; then, not less, for the advantage of all after ages. The contents of these documents was very various—chronology, history, biography, poetry, proverb, parable, allegory, dogma, precept, law. But throughout there was a supernatural element. They looked backward beyond all possible range of literary record or scientific speculation. They looked upwards higher than the keenest glances of philosophy or fancy ever travelled. More than this, they looked forward through the millenniums, and, in the name of Him who alone knows alike the end and the beginning, they declared God's great purposes towards mankind for ever—our redemption from the curse, the abolition in the earth of the empire of evil, and the everlasting triumph and reign of truth, peace, and righteousness. The most striking peculiarity and paramount glory of these Divine Scriptures, rather of this Divine Scripture—for though manifold in point of authorship, it was wondrously one in spirit, scope, and character—was its prophecy of the grace, which should by and by come to man in the fullness of the times. From beginning to end the Book was full of prophecy. In some sort the whole was prophecy. Prophecy ruled and interpreted it. It was the warp of all its history; the soul of all its ethics; the keynote and refrain of all its songs. So God ordained it. Holy men of God—God would use no others—prophesied; and they, or others for them, wrote their prophesying in the Book of God. They did not speak simply what they chose to speak, what their own intelligence dictated. Their prophecies were not the rendering in

language of their personal ideas and beliefs ; the announcement of happy conclusions respecting the future, which they had resolved for themselves out of the tangle of their own musings over the ways of Providence, and the probable destinies of the world. The mind of the prophet, however determined, was not the fountain of prophecy. It had a loftier parentage. It came from God Himself. Man was only a channel and instrument, by which the mind of God was conveyed. Scripture Prophecy, the whole of it—the men who spoke it, spoke under supernatural impulse. To use the apostle's precise expression, they spoke as they were "moved by the Holy Ghost."

This is the Lamp in the Dark Place. And if we would strike the radiant point in the light of it, we do so by marking the fact, that Scripture Prophecy is a revelation of Christ. Here is at once the scope and the limit of it. The Holy Ghost, by the voices of the prophets, told the world beforehand of One, who should save and bless it—describing, as with the pen of the historian, his Divine original ; his appearance on earth as man ; his gracious and mighty ministry in the character of Jehovah's prophet ; his substitutionary sufferings and atoning death ; his victory over the grave, and triumphant return to the Father ; his majestic session in heaven at God's right hand ; his eventual subjugation of all his enemies ; his coming again at the last day to judge the earth, and to inaugurate a new creation. Old Testament Prophecy, in a word, is the testimony of God beforehand concerning Jesus. As such, the voice from the holy mount corroborated it. And this Divine doctrine, everywhere threading the Sacred Volume, emblazoning it, animating it, flashing up and down in it like a meteor flame, or burning like a mighty

fire, God appoints to be the everlasting light of instruction, comfort, warning, and hope to his people.

How Scripture Prophecy, prophecy concerning Christ, is a lamp to the church, is not difficult of explanation. It illustrates, for example, with singular impressiveness, the omniscience and foreknowledge of God, who from the beginning anticipated the spiritual wants of man, and after the working of his own infinite wisdom provided for them all. How strikingly do these perfections of his nature come into view, as the course of human events breaks seal after seal of the mystery, hidden from the ages and generations ! And the moral attributes of God , his holiness, rectitude, truth, compassion, love—in what a noonday of illumination do they blaze before our eyes, while, with Paradise behind us, we follow step by step the lead of “the prophetic word,” first towards Bethlehem and Calvary, then, far beyond, towards the flaming throne of the Son of Man coming in his kingdom, and the high pomp of the eternal triumph of the saints ! Man was made for God, not for the Evil One—so prophecy suggests. God does not forget us, though we be fallen. We are always in his sight ; his attention is never for a moment withdrawn from us. He has his own plan of dealing with the emergency of our moral circumstances ; but He does deal with it. Because one day with Him is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, human foolishness often counts Him slack and indifferent. He is not. Prophecy makes it clear, that He is not. The fulfilling of prophecy in the past and in the present is conclusive evidence, that God comprehends our entire case, that He is deliberately accomplishing his own secret but most gracious counsels, and that He makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him. The

providential obscurity, in which his people spend their probationary life; the evil which they must needs encounter, if they will show forth his praise; the struggle and travail, wherewith alone the church can protect itself against its enemies, or can win further victories over the power of darkness; all this—prophetic Scripture teaches us—so far from being accidental or arbitrary, is distinctly within the cognizance of God, and enters into the sublime and gracious scheme of his redemptive wisdom. The salvation of mankind—such is the voice of the oracle—was to be wrought out, through a series of progressive dispensations, on the principle of conflict and sorrow. The great author of it, when He appeared, was to heal the world by stripes, which He should Himself suffer at the hands of God. He was to bruise the head of the serpent, at the cost of his own sore wound. Only thus could He obtain a portion with the great, and divide the spoil with the strong. And as with the Master, so was it to be with the servants also. Throughout the Inspired Volume two distinct yet harmonious strains rule the music of its prophecy. The children of God are to suffer: the children of God are to reign. Alike for the individual and for the brotherhood, there is to be first a season of dimness, then a glorious illumination; first a discipline of trial, then an unspeakable deliverance; first a bitter and prolonged war with the evil forces of the universe, then a perfect and everlasting victory. And so Old Testament Prophecy is a light; for it throws flashes of brightness through the very clouds, which girdle the throne of God; it ministers consolation to the good, under the pressure of providential trouble, by explaining, that this is a necessary condition of their final perfecting; it cautions us, that we be not misled by temporary

appearances, and so allow ourselves to become the victims of unbelief, of worldly-mindedness, and of a criminal self-love ; and it stimulates the Church of Christ to all holy toil and patience, because it never fails to point to a distant but visible horizon, where the golden towers of the New Jerusalem mount into the sky, and where the gleaming of a glory not of this world reveals the blessed fact, that "there remaineth a rest for the people of God."

Having the lamp, we are to "take heed" to it—so the apostle teaches. In speaking thus, he makes an important assumption. He takes it for granted, that, as believers in Christ, we have a supernatural capacity of discerning the prophetic element in Scripture. All men have not the capacity. There may be the keenest intelligence, the largest and ripest learning, the most careful, critical and prolonged study of the sacred text : yet the meaning may be wholly missed for want of the necessary eyesight. This is why so many find no Christ in Old Testament Scripture. The light of it is spiritual, and it is spiritually discerned. It is not that Christ is exhibited here and there merely at distant points along the line of the record, or that the revelation of Him is vague, obscure, and dubious. Prophecy is not a labyrinth, a puzzle, a dark saying of old. It is a light. As matter of fact, the whole realm of Scripture is radiant with the pervasive and most manifest presence of Christ. But we must have the eyes. No wicked man can see the prophetic light. Neither can a lover of this world. Neither can the intellectually proud and self-reliant. The servants of Christ see it. Their understanding is miraculously opened. The "anointing from the holy one" is upon them, and they "know all things." The apostle assumes this. And not this only.

He assumes still further, that, being Christians, we are mindful of the light. It does not occur to him as possible, that a single servant of the Lord should cover the lamp in his dwelling with the bushel, still less that the Church should walk in the dark place with a shut Bible in its hand. Of course—his language suggests—we take heed to the light. But let us see, that we avail ourselves to the uttermost of the privilege, and that we render full justice to the duty. This is the apostolic exhortation.

To fulfil it supposes an adequate Recognition of the Prophetic character of Scripture. The denial of prophecy is the denial of Christianity. No one who accepts the inspiration of the New Testament can rationally scruple the supernatural predictions of the Old. But it is possible for a believer to disparage the light by a theory. Let us beware of this. While we repudiate everything like an arbitrary, random, and fanatical method of dealing with the contents of Scripture, let us be careful not to lower the level of its own testimony concerning itself, as though its language could mean no more than appears on the surface. If there is one dogma of the sceptical Biblical Criticism, of which we should be more jealous than another, it is the dogma, which limits the value of a prophetic Scripture to the immediate occasion, and to the naked grammatical construction of its terms. The words of Scripture Prophecy stand by themselves in human literature; and they are to be interpreted by canons, which transcend all ordinary science. When God spoke by the prophets, He often intended more and other than the language employed would naturally seem to convey. So Christ and his apostles represent. And those who take heed to the light will treat Scripture accordingly, and will look for germination, expansion, and development in the

meaning of it, even where nothing meets the eye, it may be, but an unpromising "root out of a dry ground."

No doubt the apostle would encourage us, further, to a Devout Study of Scripture in its character of Prophecy. While no man can track out the "mind of the Spirit" by mere dint of grammar and dictionary, we are not beyond the need of human helps and appliances for the comprehension of it. The lexicon, the commentary, the sermon, all have their place on this sacred territory; and nowhere is the exercise of attention, thought, and judgment either more indispensable, or more likely to conduct to happy issues. It is insanity, not spirituality, which hopes to read out the meaning of the cipher and symbolism of prophetic Scripture on the principle of defying all the known rules of literary composition, and of attaining the loftiest knowledge without using rational means for securing it. To "take heed" to the words of inspiration is to occupy ourselves in a diligent, patient, cautious, and devout study of them. Let us emphasize this last attribute, as the apostle would have us do. The very element of all successful study of the Scriptures is the spirit of devotion. They only reveal their meaning to the lowly and reverent heart.

It is often overlooked—it ought not to be—that the miracle which created the Scripture is perpetuated in the supernatural power to understand it, which God reserves for his servants of the open eyes. All others knock in vain at the door of the treasure house. There are views of God Himself, of the principles and methods of the Divine government, of the events of human history, of the significance of times and seasons, of the tendencies of national and social life, of the prospects of the gospel and of mankind—views of these and a thousand other subjects—

contained in Scripture Prophecy, which for ever elude the mere scholar and critic, but which the Spirit of God discloses to men who believe and pray. Revelations such as these may refuse—they often do refuse—to formulate themselves in language; and “wise men after the flesh” make their own account of them. They are realities notwithstanding. “By the determinate counsel of God” the “babes” hold the key of the mysteries; and the true, though often hidden, meaning of the prophets’ voices shines on those, whose prayerful hearts cry out for super-human light and guidance.

But what St. Peter chiefly intends is, that the followers of Christ should make the prophetic teaching of Scripture the Directory of their Life and Conduct. He does not summon them so much to an intellectual as to a practical attention to it. He supposes, that the meaning of Prophecy, at least in its great outlines and bearings, is sufficiently manifest to all faithful souls; and he simply exhorts them to avail themselves of the lamp, which God has lighted for them. In contradistinction from the world, which puts its own construction upon Providence, and follows its own lights; in contradistinction also from the sin and folly of Christians so called, who should attempt to do their allotted tasks in the dark; let the wise and good servants—the apostle says—be careful to walk under the heaven-born illumination of the ancient word of Prophecy. Let the Church as a whole do so. Let every particular member of it do so. As an index and guide to duty, as a safeguard against error and worldliness, as a sure consolation under trial, as an encouragement to patience in well-doing, as a never failing lodestar of hope, let all mark and follow that gracious light, which God has appointed to shine in the obscurity of his people’s life on the earth.

And in doing this we “do well”—the apostle assures us. He does not mean that we fare well, and are blessed, though this is most true; but that we do what accords with our character and circumstances, and with the high will and purpose of God concerning us. It is a mournful sight to see, when professedly Christian men turn away from the lamp of God, and seek to compass themselves with sparks of their own kindling—false lights, feeble lights, lights that will certainly go out when their help is most needed. They do not well, either for themselves or for the cause of truth, who substitute the candles of nature, tradition, or merely human science, for the torch of “the prophetic word.” Only then is it well done, when we take heed to what God spake of old time by the fathers to the prophets. No other course of action proceeds upon a basis of knowledge. We are to follow prophecy because we know that it is divine—so the apostle puts it. All other illumination is misleading. It exists in appearance, not in reality. Faith in the witness which God has given of his Son in Holy Scripture, is the only principle of human conduct, which does honour to God’s moral government; which disengages our earthly life from the meshes of utterly inexplicable mystery; which puts man on a level with himself, and with the demands of God upon him; and which opens, before the troubled gaze of Christ’s faithful people all down the ages, the inspiring prospect of a final and glorious justification of the ways of God to men. Apart from this source of enlightenment, man can never carry himself worthily of his high original, his present vocation, or his solemn destiny. Misconception of God, spiritual pride, restlessness, cowardice, panic, despair, all follow naturally from disbelief and neglect of “the oracles of God.” On the other hand, a reverent, practical regard

to these oracles, while it does homage to the perfections of God, at the same time exalts the intelligence of man, endues the servant of Christ with the twofold spirit of a holy resignation and a holy bravery, and supplies the universal church with inexhaustible argument to patient continuance in well-doing. We quit ourselves like men, and act with the true wisdom and nobility of the sons of God—such is the core of the apostle's words—only in so far as we “take heed to the lamp shining in the dark place.”

But a limit of time is drawn by the apostle. We are to take heed to the light until the day breaks, and the great daystar, the sun, rises upon the world of our experience and duty. The darkness is temporary, and will vanish away. By and by the lamp will be needed no longer, because the morning is come, and with it the disappearance for ever of all the perils and anxieties of the night season.

For the individual Christian, the term of his personal life is the nighttime. As long as life continues, the darkness, less or more, will continue also. We shall never be able to disengage ourselves from it. Providence, before our eyes, will go on its way of silent mystery. Our faith will find itself pressed by uncontrollable circumstances. The night of perplexity and trial may seem to deepen with us as the years move onward. Nor will any access of grace, still less any worldly wisdom, supply the illumination necessary for the accomplishment of our Christian course. Everywhere and always we shall require the help of that Inspired Word, which God has given to his people as “a lamp to their feet, and a light to their path.” But the use of it is confined to the night; and the morning

draws on. Erelong, perhaps by imperceptible approaches, perhaps without notice, on an instant, the sun will appear, and the darkness will pass away for ever. To the true disciple—him of the weary, watching spirit, who has waited long for the dawning—death is daylight. The Master comes, and with Him the full, complete, and everlasting sunshine of the heart.

For the Church, the period of the last dispensation is the nighttime. Till this shall have run out, the obscurity will remain. The lapse of the ages, if it adds no article to the Christian Creed—as it will not—will yet, in all probability, furnish new and very precious views of the truth of Christ, and will vastly augment the already ample stores of the Church's experience. We may hope too, nay, may reckon upon it as certain, that the internal life of the Church of the future will be far more complete and glorious than it has hitherto been. In a very blessed sense, the Church, in its spirituality, purity, zeal, obedience, worship, will come, in the unity of faith and love, to "a perfect man in Christ Jesus." And through its prayers and holy exertions the knowledge of God will cover the face of the earth. Still the darkness will linger. Ignorance, infirmity, pain, death, temptation, and other evils inseparable from a state of minority and moral trial, will throw their shadows round the godly. And so long the Church will require, and must avail itself of the light, of which the apostle speaks. It is worthy of remark, that, in St. Peter's language, there is not a hint of the coming of a day, when the lamp of God shall be superseded by any other source of illumination. For us, indeed, Prophetic Scripture has a dimension beyond that which St. Peter knew. The ancient light, in our presence, flames with the added brightness of further revelation; the

Inspired Word of the New Testament intensifying the earlier light of the Old. And all that has been said respecting the value, to the Church of God, of Old Testament Prophecy, might be repeated concerning that of the later Canon of Scripture. But St. Peter does not expressly refer to this. In the last chapter of the Epistle he does indeed speak of the writings of St. Paul, possibly of others his contemporaries, as having the seal of Divine Inspiration upon them, and as containing the same prophetic element with the Old Testament Volume. But these, to his thought, were only so much extension and corroboration of the older Scripture; and precious as they were, they were not to override and supplant what the Spirit of God had previously written. On to the end of time, St. Peter takes it for granted the Church would need the light of Moses and the Prophets. As to any such development of "spiritual consciousness" in the Church, to use the jargon of a well-known quasi-philosophy, as should render the ancient Bible a dead letter, and should thrust it aside as the worn out primer of the Church's nursery life—had the apostle but caught the faintest glimpse of the conceit, he would have scathed it to ashes with his Master's terrible word to himself, "Behind me, Satan"! No. As long as the Church is on earth, it will be nighttime with it, and the hearts of its members will want the guidance, stimulus, and consolation of the light of Prophecy. But the darkness will depart. As death ushers in the morning for each individual believer, so the second coming of Christ in his glory will be the advent of the dayspring for the entire family of God. By and by—we know not when—the eastern horizon of the Church's shadowed life shall blaze up, on a sudden, with the glory of the final sunrise; and the nighttime shall re-

main as a memory only of toil and battle, then for ever overpast.

The daylight is coming ! This is the parting music of the apostle's doctrine. The tyrannous reign of the Prince of Darkness is to be abolished. The wicked are to be severed from among the just, and are to trouble them no more. The days of ignorance, of broken tranquillity, of perilous wrestling with sin, of exacting service and warfare, are to be replaced by perfect knowledge, and by quietness and assurance for ever. How of the things of the night, when it is thus—the wolves and the bats, that have haunted the darkness ? Let me never lose sight of it, whether as a warning or an encouragement—"The day is at hand." Whatever other object fixes my gaze, let this be the goal of my thought and expectation. It is my calling of God to share in the morning joy ; for "to them that look for Him will He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." With such a prospect before me, "what manner of person ought I to be in all holy conversation and godliness" ! How small account should I make of the temporary evils of the night season ! How diligently should I do the Master's work in hope of his coming ! God forbid, that any creature vanity should obscure to my view the grandeur and blessedness of the approaching daydawn ! In its own awful and ravishing magnificence, let it ever stand before the eyes of my faith, and give colour and direction to all my earthly life. So when the crisis shall arrive, I shall be "found of Him in peace," and world without end shall walk with the sons of the morning, where there is no more night.

CHRIST PREACHING TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON.

“FOR it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.”—1 PETER iii. 17—22.

1. APART from the Bible, there is nothing more bewildering than that goodness should suffer. Indeed, with the Bible, it does not cease to be a mystery. That evil should suffer is not strange. It is its nature. Taken at the best, evil implies estrangement from God; and this of itself is suffering. And when pronounced and active, evil wages war on God, and inevitably runs upon “the thick bosses of his buckler.” But goodness, God’s delight, God’s handiwork, the very copy and image of the un-suffering Being—that this should suffer, is a marvel indeed.

2. It is no less a fact, and one which, familiar though it be, the apostle would have us mark. Goodness, even in its highest style and very royalty, is liable to suffer.

You may imagine a goodness without spot or wrinkle. Under the conditions of this world and of man's life in it, there is no moral height so high, but suffering can climb up to it. It is not an idea. It is not a speculation. It is a fact of history. "Even Christ also suffered."

3. And here St. Peter has a doctrine—not his merely, but the universal doctrine of Scripture—which, at first sight, only increases the mystery. The suffering of goodness is always by the express will of God. It is not the result of any oversight or error in the original constitution of things. Neither is it caused by any unforeseen friction or collision in the course of the Divine administration. It does not even happen, according to what is often, though erroneously, judged to be the general Providence of God, as something which might as well occur as not. It is ordained, prescribed, appointed, dealt out as by weight and measure, under the regulating hand of God's perfection. Thus the Scriptures always represent the sufferings of Christ. The slaying of God's Lamb was foreordained before the foundation of the world. So completely was this event removed from the sphere of the indifferent and casual. And the like is true of all suffering, as it affects the good. Hear the apostle. "If the will of God will it," you suffer; not otherwise.

4. But light breaks upon the darkness. If suffering comes by the will of God, there are adequate reasons for it. Creature will is blind, weak, capricious, wanton, malignant. God's will is perfect, and all its action is directed by reasons worthy of his attributes and character.

5. What the reasons are, in particular instances, we may be quite unable to define. Their magnitude, their number, their complexity may baffle or elude us. Yet we need not go beyond the text to discover two very

principal ones. When goodness suffers, God always contemplates—first, the natural or moral advantage of others ; and secondly, the moral and natural advantage of the sufferer himself.

6. “The just” Christ suffered. It was, as St. Peter informs us, to heal, and restore, and give immortal life to the countless “unjust” of mankind. This was the meaning of his deadly stripes. “The God of all grace . . . called us unto his eternal glory by” his suffering Son “Christ Jesus,” our Lord. And it is probable, that never, since the world began, has there been a case of human goodness suffering, but the benefit of others, in some kind or degree, has been contemplated by it. If earth could learn nothing, at least heaven had its lesson. It may be, no more edifying spectacle ever greets the eyes of arch-angels, than that of solitary human goodness—such as, in days of old, lay hid in dens and caves of the earth ; such as now lies hid in weary cellars and garrets of our Christian cities—suffering according to the will of God. Again and again in this Epistle, St. Peter challenges attention to this first purpose of suffering, the purpose which is external to the sufferer.

7. No less certainly does the suffering of goodness, in the Divine intention, contemplate the moral and natural benefit of the sufferer himself.

8. The august mystery of our Lord’s twofold nature compels us to caution and reserve, when we speak of the moral design of suffering, as exemplified in Him. Yet we cannot go astray in following the express guidance of Scripture. It is true, there was no room for moral perfecting in Christ, either by suffering or by any other process, so far as such perfecting implies the suppression and abolition of evil. In this respect perfecting was

impossible with Him, who knew no sin. In another sense, however, not only was it possible ; it was actually wrought. Even He, Son of God though He was, learned a complete, sustained, and finished obedience to the will of the Father, by the things which He suffered. Only thus was He made competent to become the author and captain of salvation to them that obey Him.

9. And the entire Volume of Revelation—its history, its doctrine, its spirit—utters but a single voice as to the fact of such a moral purpose of suffering for all the good. As St. Peter speaks in the following chapter, he who suffers in the flesh, in God's design ceases from sin, "that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the desires of men, but to the will of God." The good may not always comprehend, they may not always recognise, the significance of their suffering. But this is God's meaning in it. You suffer in the flesh, as Christ did. God says to you—Arm yourselves with Christ's mind ; and let suffering work in you at once a strenuous hostility to evil, and a universal consecration of your being to God's all-holy will.

10. In the text, the stress of the apostle's teaching lies in a somewhat different direction. It goes to the double point, that unspeakable natural advantage is coupled, in the Divine intention, with the sufferings of the good ; and that, in this respect, their suffering forms an affecting contrast with that of the wicked. It is good to suffer as welldoers: it is better to suffer as welldoers than as evildoers.

11. It would not be difficult to show, that, apart from any ultimate benefit, which may accrue to welldoers from suffering, there are elements of Providential advantage, both negative and positive, bound up in the very nature of such suffering. St. Peter suggests the existence of

these elements, and directs our thoughts to them. For example :

The suffering of the godly is not penal. When God strikes an evildoer, He does it in displeasure ; and this same displeasure is the iron, which enters into the soul. It is not so with the righteous. “It pleased the Lord to bruise” his own Son. He was not angry with Him. There was no sin or guile to provoke the anger. On the contrary He was “chosen of God and precious.” What He suffered, He suffered voluntarily as our substitute. He was “made a curse for us.” “The chastisement of our peace,” not of any evil of his own, “was upon Him.” So of God’s servants universally. Suffering, with them, is corrective, educational, disciplinary ; it is never, strictly speaking, penal.

Such suffering, again, is never without supernatural mitigations. Who does not know, how deeply the suffering of evildoers is aggravated by want of Divine succours and supports ? To be in trouble, and to have no refuge in God—this is woe indeed ! Christ committed Himself to the Father in all his suffering. Though compelled by the severity of it to offer up “prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him,” his reverent submission secured for Him Divine hearing and help. And “the spirit of glory and of God,” as St. Peter says, rests upon the disciples in their evil day. They are “in heaviness,” and they are “exceeding glad.” They suffer “fiery trial,” and—O wonderful paradox !—they “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Angels comforted the Lord in his tribulation. The Lord of angels comes by his good Spirit, and comforts his people in theirs.

Once more—the suffering of the good is never final.

We cannot say this of the suffering of evildoers. Of well-doers it is most blessedly and absolutely true. "Once" in the course of the past eternity Christ suffered for sins—only once. He had never suffered before. He will never suffer again. And the suffering of his followers is rigorously limited by the duration of their life in this world. Thank God, it is a falsehood—the dogma, which makes a purgatorial fire, and not "the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" to cleanse from all sin! For the godly, the termination of life is strictly and universally the termination of suffering.

12. The apostle, however, rises higher than all this. He would have us mark the suffering of goodness in its full dimension and final issues. In particular we are to note, how God always brings suffering to a happy result; how He makes it the sure minister of blessing; how it is a principle of his all-wise government, that faithful continuance in welldoing under trial shall in the end be rewarded with happiness and honour for the sufferer beyond all that was otherwise possible; how eye hath not seen nor ear heard what good things God hath prepared as the ultimate estate of his suffering servants; last of all, what unutterable solemnity and impressiveness belong to the contrast between the suffering of welldoers and that of evildoers, when we thus contemplate both on the widest scale, and in view of their supreme and abiding consequences. It is here especially, with this contrast before us, that we are to stand and receive our lesson—It is good to suffer for welldoing: it is better to suffer for welldoing than for evildoing.

13. Two cases are proposed by St. Peter in illustration of his doctrine. *First* the case of *Unexampled*

Goodness in Unexampled Suffering: and Secondly, the case of Distinguished Goodness in Extraordinary Suffering.

14. The apostle's first example is that of the Lord Himself, the sufferer of sufferers. The occasion and causes of the suffering of Christ, the nature and degree of it, we need not now dwell upon in detail. Suffice it say, that, as the world's sin-offering, the power of darkness did its worst with Him. He "resisted unto blood, striving" with earth and hell "against sin. And man being the agent, the original murderer of man the prompter of the deed, his precious flesh, exempt as it was from the curse by reason of its sinlessness, was put to the shameful, agonizing death of the cross.

15. But what a sequel had the suffering of Christ! We do not now speak of its consequences for others. Viewed thus, it was glorious indeed. It stripped the principalities and powers of the kingship, which they had usurped over the world. It constituted the legal and moral release of mankind from the authority of the Wicked One. It recovered for human nature the lost rights and prerogatives of its original sonship with God. But for Himself also—may we not reverently say it?—what a sequel! He saw death: He saw no corruption. His flesh—the only element of his being on which death could even for a moment lay its finger—becoming the subject of the most stupendous miracle of all time: the power of God snatching it from the grasp of death, and quickening it into newness of undying life. His whole humanity, now sunk as low as the grave and as Joseph's sepulchre; and now lifted up, and gone transfigured and glorified into heaven; there, in indissoluble union with his divinity to abide for ever at the right hand of God—the Saviour-King of the

earth ; the triumphant conqueror of Satan and his hosts ; all creatures, even the highest of them, angels, principalities, powers, willingly or unwillingly put in subjection to Him.

16. Truly, in this unique case of our Lord, we have ample evidence, that, if the will of God will it, it is good to suffer for welldoing. Nor is our contrast wanting ; though the apostle rather hints at it, than states it. Christ's suffering as a welldoer touched closely in the endurance of it, and in its issue and effect is everlastingly connected with the suffering of evildoers. Must we not say it?—hard though it be to do so. Better even the conflict of Gethsemane and of Calvary, than the utter rout and bottomless perdition of those evil spirits, of whom Christ openly made a spectacle, triumphing over them in his cross ; and whom He now holds “in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” !

17. Thus, at the central point of the world's history, St. Peter finds illustration of his double doctrine as to suffering. Yet not here alone. The very outset of the life of mankind, to the view of the apostle, no less than its adult age, furnishes illustration hardly less decisive and striking. The case to which he points is that of Noah and the antediluvians.

18. The salvation of Noah from the flood has thrown such a halo of glory around him, as almost to put out of sight the Providential affliction, of which that signal deliverance was the termination and reward. In the text the patriarch is exhibited as the leader of the noble army of sufferers for welldoing. Was he not such a sufferer ?

19. It is hard to be better than those among whom we live. Noah stood alone in his righteousness in an age,

the moral pravity of which inspiration itself has painted in colours so dark, that no darker are conceivable. "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was evil, only evil, and that continually." Alas for the solitary saint, whose home was an earth full of men such as this language pictures !

20. Wicked men do not believe in miracles ; and they hate those who do. Noah believed in a stupendous miracle and preached it. With the clear sky above him, and the strong earth underfoot, he declared his persuasion, that a catastrophe was coming, which should drown the world ; and for more than a century he acted out his faith by "building an ark for the saving of his house." Imagine the satire and chuckle, the spite and outrage, amidst which he must have witnessed his good confession !

21. When does God tax a servant of his most heavily ? Never more, perhaps, than when He sets him face to face with a fellow man condemned to die, and calls upon him to fulfil, under circumstances so difficult and solemn, the functions of the preacher of sin and salvation. It was Noah's single vocation to discharge this office towards a world, of which God had said, "The end of all flesh is come before Me, and I will drown them with the earth."

Among all the godly sufferers of the generations, few, if we consider it duly, can ever have suffered more than did "Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness."

22. But how of his suffering followed to its climax and consequence ? How of it when, with the advent of the day of doom, God shut him up in the ark, and then, a hundred and fifty days after, set him down with his household, a living man, on the mountains of Ararat ?

The survivor of the old world, the father of the new, a name of renown, which neither earth nor heaven will let die! Verily, the history of Noah being witness, it is on the whole and in the end good, unutterably good, if the will of God be so, that we suffer as welldoers. And how much better as welldoers than as evildoers, let the case of that same antediluvian world, for which Noah suffered, tell us.

23. There was one great set-off against the suffering of Noah's wicked contemporaries. "Disobedient" as they were, God showed them longsuffering. They had a season of grace. Anticipating the dispensations, even now in the childhood of human history, Christ came forth from the Father as the revelation of Divine forbearance and clemency, and not in the flesh indeed, but by his Spirit, the Spirit of prophecy, poured out upon Noah, He went as a herald of peace and goodwill, and published God's salvation to the lost world. All the while that the ark was preparing, the patience of God waited to see, whether a Gospel, preached under the dark forecast of the threatened doom, might not lead the evildoers to repentance and everlasting salvation.

24. But this action of Divine grace, while it was most real and blessed, only brings into stronger relief the terribleness of God's judicial sentence upon the evildoers. Observe: though the gospel which Christ's Spirit preached to them provided for the salvation of their souls, it made no offer—it was not intended to make any offer—of escape from the flood. So far as their flesh was concerned, they had sinned unto death, and the decree was absolute—they must irrevocably perish. They were hardly living men to whom the Spirit preached. They were guilty, condemned, yet evangelized human "spirits," shut up in the world, as

in a prisonhouse, by their corporeal life, awaiting the appointed day, which should deprive them of that life, and overwhelm them all in common and ignominious destruction. In respect of that element of their nature, in which they were made after the image of God, as the apostle speaks in the next chapter—the soul, that is to say—they had the opportunity of salvation; they might live and not die. In respect of the flesh, notwithstanding the grace of Noah's mission, they were adjudged to suffer the common heritage and doom of fallen man under an extraordinary visitation of Divine displeasure—they must die by the waters of the deluge, and that without remedy. In so far as the bodily life of the antediluvians went, the gospel of the much-suffering preacher was a gospel to "the dead."

25. And if we will only think of it—that inexorable decree, which no regrets or amendments on the part of the transgressors, no grace of the Divine dispensations themselves could reverse or modify; or if, turning from the decree, we fix our eyes upon the culprit world itself, all through those long years blessed with the word of mercy, it is true, yet locked and bolted in by God's righteous wrath, reserved against the day of the overthrow, and then at the determined season destroyed with a destruction from which there was absolutely no escape; we shall feel that it was not without evidence of historic fact, that St. Peter said—"It is better," suffering brethren in Christ; be assured "it is better to suffer as well-doers than as evildoers."

26. But, as a standing ordinance of God in the Gospel—the apostle teaches—what was true of Christ, and long before of Noah, an early Old Testament type and

minister of Christ, holds likewise of suffering in general, as it affects respectively the good and evil of mankind.

27. Milleniums have passed away, since Noah's flood did its double work of destruction and salvation. That baptism of water, the life of the few—eight souls, only eight, were saved by it; the death of the many—it drowned the world—belongs to the hazy dawn of human history. The mouth of the centuries long ago sucked up its waters. And God's word has passed, that neither it, nor the like of it shall recur as long as the sun and moon endure. It was, and is not. It is gone, and will never come back again, either as a scourge or a blessing.

28. And yet—St. Peter would have us understand—there is a sense, a most real and important one, in which it continues, in which it will continue, both as a life-giver and a destroyer for ever. Noah's flood, bearing the ark of salvation on its bosom, with a drowning world about it, was a figure of things to come; and its "antitype" or counterpart, Christ's Baptism, performs in perpetuity, only in higher respects and on a vaster scale, the functions of the great historic deluge.

29. Let none be so absurd or profane as to suppose, that the natural element of water in the Christian Sacrament either saves or kills the soul of man. At least let St. Peter be held guiltless of any such dogma. Not only does he not teach it, or anything akin to it; he distinctly disavows and bars the idea. Almost in so many words he says—I do not speak of any physical process or appliance. It is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh by the washing of water, whether in fact or symbol, which makes Christ's Baptism the antitype of Noah's flood. It is the spiritual forces and agencies, which the Baptismal Water presupposes, implies, and represents.

These are the ark-carrying flood, which constitutes, for all time and for all eternity, at once the salvation of the suffering righteous, and the sure destruction of those who take the path of the evildoers.

30. The victory which Christ won over the powers of evil, when, as our representative and deliverer, He rose again from the dead, and in his glorified humanity sat down at God's right hand, was the inauguration of a new era of grace and salvation for the world. Thenceforward the sprinkling of his blood, received by faith, was to become the reconciliation of the rebellious, and the inward washing of the Spirit of Life which is in Him, received through the same faith, was to be the spiritual purification and quickening of the unholy. For all men, everywhere and always, it was provided, that as the coming of the flood was Noah's life, so the mystical water and blood of the Redeemer's passion, made available by his rising again, should rid believing men of their sense of guilt through the revelation of God's forgiving love, and should reinstate them in the image of God through the new-creating energy of his Holy Spirit. In other words, that supernatural grace, which comes upon all who truly believe in Christ as the Saviour of the world—the grace of his atonement applied by his gladdening and hallowing Spirit; the grace which cleanses the heart from an evil conscience, just as water cleanses the body from pollution, and which puts in its place a conscience void of offence, a good conscience, a conscience answering to God's expectation and requirement concerning us; the grace which brings the soul and so the entire character and life of man into holy "answer," or correspondence to the will of God—this grace, become, if we may so say, the very substance and life of our spirits, is salvation. And so understood,

Christ's Baptism saves us from our sins and from all their punitive and moral consequences.

31. In the Divine will and provision it is the salvation of all men. The office of the natural flood, the type of Christ's Baptism, was mainly judicial, not gracious. It was not designed to be the salvation of more than the eight. It carried the elect family safely in the ark, but it also carried that ark out of the reach of all besides. The primary work of Christ's Baptism, the antitype of Noah's flood, is not to kill, but to make alive. It brings the ark near to the perishing; it does not take it away. And the door is open. And the blessed Keeper of the door—whosoever cometh unto Him, He will in no-wise cast him out. O joyful gospel—a safe ark, and an unobstructed entrance, and a universal welcome!

32. Christ's Baptism is the actual salvation of those who believe. In the text itself nothing is said of faith as a necessary link of connection between the Baptism and the salvation. The whole Epistle, however, like the rest of the New Testament, assumes it. More than this, it expressly and repeatedly teaches the doctrine in terms. In the very beginning of his letter, St. Peter speaks of "obedience" to the Gospel as preliminary to the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" upon the soul. And that he means by this what St. Paul, in the Romans, calls "the obedience of faith" is manifest—not to mention other parts of the Epistle—from several places in the first chapter, where "faith" is represented to be vitally and universally bound up with all Christian experience and hope. It is blessedly true, indeed, that economically, and in the way of gracious arrangement and overture, Christ's Baptism saves all men. At the same time, it is consciously, veritably, and in the strict and full

sense of the language, the salvation of those only of mankind, who receive it by a true and living faith. The ark-sustaining flood, in days of old, saved believing Noah. Christ's Baptism now saves "*us*," who "by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead and gave Him glory." Of that "other gospel" of our times, which denies this, maintaining in the name of Divine benevolence that the salvation of Christ's spiritual Baptism is independent of faith, and that all men alike enjoy the grace of it, it is enough to say, that neither in the text, nor in any other part of the Sacred Volume, is there the faintest suggestion of any such teaching.

33. Believers in Christ have salvation in Him. Not from suffering. On the contrary the salvation implies suffering, and, for a season at least, brings it in its train. Before we can even receive the Baptism of Christ's mercy and power, there must be the putting away of "the former lusts in our ignorance," and of the evil associations into which they brought us. The heart too must submit in repentance and contrition to that Divine Spirit, whose office it is to separate us from the practice and love of sin—in this sense, as in others, to "hallow" us—and so to make us ready for the mercyseat with its revelation of peace and life. And when the Baptism comes upon us, and we are begotten again to a "living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away"—like Noah, in prospect of this miracle of the future, we are called, in face of our nature and circumstances, to "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God." Now this of necessity entails suffering, perhaps tribulation, perhaps agony. Direct Divine discipline apart, no man can present Himself to God a living sacrifice without

suffering much in the struggle with his native love of the world and with his own self-sparing, self-asserting, self-idolizing will. And in multitudes of instances, a life of true faith in God will bring us perforce into strong antagonism with evil men—it may be, those of our own households—who will revile and persecute because we “run not with them to the same excess of riot,” or at least because we are bent on postponing earth to heaven, and time to eternity. It is not too much to say, that Christ’s Baptism, so far from being a shelter from suffering, is baptism into suffering for every one who receives it.

34. None the less, however, does the Baptism save us. There is the suffering; and there is the coexistent salvation. Repentance may be bitter; but we have “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.” It may cost us much to wrench our affections from the world and to transfer them to Christ; but he who does this gains God, and in Him “a hundredfold more in this present time,” as well as “eternal life” in the timeless time to come. The demands of the Christian service may be weighty: but every burden brings with it “grace for seasonable help.” Though “just now for a little while”—as the apostle phrases it—made sorrowful, if needs be, by manifold temptations, we rejoice with superhuman joy, knowing whom we have believed, and hoping, with a hope that maketh not ashamed, to be found of Him in peace, when Christ shall come. The salvation is independent of the suffering. So far from being any the less real or glorious on this account, the suffering only tends to heighten, enhance, and perfect the salvation. The Baptism of Christ is salvation with suffering, in suffering, through, above, and eventually for ever beyond the reach of suffering.

35. And here we reach our climax. The Baptism saves. The salvation is begun. It continues, and goes forward. But it is not finished. By and by it will be finished. The suffering shall cease absolutely and eternally. For every soul, which has the Baptism upon it, it shall cease ; for the whole congregation of God's elect, cease. Now, in the fiercest furnace of the suffering, salvation from misery, the world, and sin. Ere long, the grace will rise into yet loftier proportions—salvation from death ; salvation from the grave ; salvation from God's everlasting wrath into consummate, holy, and immortal bliss. Saved as we already are, at present we do but wait for salvation. In its full bloom and ripeness, it is an experience of the future. Christ's Baptism is perfect and everlasting salvation. We shall die : we shall not die. "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." We shall go down to the dust, as the Lord did. The Spirit, which quickened Him, shall quicken our mortal bodies also, and make them "like unto his glorious body." We shall witness the great catastrophe of the world and the wicked. It shall be the signal and herald of our finished salvation. The coming of the flood will be the uplifting of the ark ; and the blessed freight of redeemed and living souls, which finds shelter there—God Himself shall be with them, and be their God, and shall give them safe landing on his eternal and holy hill.

36. Would that we might end here ! We may not. There is an emphasis in the text, which forbids it. "The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth also now save *us*." Are there those then, whom it does not save, whom on the contrary it destroys ? It is even so. This is, in part, what the apostle seems to mean. We have the doctrine suggested more distinctly in the following

chapter. The condemned antediluvians, virtually “dead” while they lived, and long ago numbered with the actually dead of mankind, had a gospel of eternal salvation preached to them, that, when the flood came, their souls might live, though their bodies died. And God is “ready,” St. Peter says, “to judge the living” evildoers of these last days—by the flood the antitype, appears to be his meaning—just as He judged those ancient dead ones by the flood the type. He is angry with them now. They are condemned already by the sentence of his just law. Only his mercy spares them. They are evangelised. Time is given them for repentance. They may obtain place in the ark, and be saved. But this gracious dispensation has its limits, and not very distant ones. “The end of all things is at hand.” A day impends, when a flood, which shall cause the deluge of the early earth to go for ever out of view, shall break in upon the sinful of mankind, and shall sweep them all away in irremediable destruction.

37. Here then we have our contrast again under aspects, which, for us, are affecting and solemn beyond all parallel. The servants of Christ suffer. His Baptism is their salvation. The despisers of Christ suffer. For them, the water of life turns into an overwhelming deluge of death, and they cannot escape. It is one of the most awful views, which Scripture gives us, of the case of those of mankind, who eventually suffer as evildoers. Their suffering consists and culminates in this, that they perish through that very flood, which to the welldoers is everlasting salvation. The same cross, which is the redemption and life of the Church, is the wreck and perdition of the unbelieving. Because Jesus died, and rose again, and reigns, therefore He rules his

enemies with iron, and breaks them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

38. The argument, the phraseology, and the direct teaching of the apostle all point to the doctrine, which we have now exhibited—a doctrine, which repeatedly presents itself, under various forms, in New Testament Scripture. And if this be so, what becomes of the dogma of a universal restoration? The last flood will hardly save those, whom it is expressly sent to destroy! If the righteous are “scarcely saved” in the ark, “where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear”? Brethren, the Gospel is God's last expedient for the saving of human souls from “the wrath to come”; and if this fails, all fails. The Bible knows nothing, absolutely nothing, of any issues of human existence beyond those which the use or abuse of the Gospel determines. In teaching, as St. Paul seems to teach us here, that the very balm of the soul shall become the poison of those whom it does not heal, and that God's supreme blessing shall be transmuted, for all who reject it, into his worst anathema, the Scriptures cut away the ground for ever from beneath a phantasy, which is as hollow and irrational, as it is bold and specious. Whatever violence we choose to do to the revelation of the Bible, and so to our own intelligence, conscience, and soul, let us not so deceive ourselves, or so “turn the truth of God into a lie,” as to convert the cross into a stage-play, to make “the wrath of the Lamb” an unmeaning figure of speech, or to dream that God, in the last day, will dismiss the wicked into “everlasting punishment” only to call them back again into “life eternal.” No! So far as the Bible is concerned, there is no end beyond the end, upon which the curtain drops in the concluding words of the twenty-fifth of St. Matthew just quoted. And it is with

this end before us, in both its parts, that St. Peter would have us hear his doctrine concerning suffering, in the uttermost stretch and plenitude of its significance. It is good to suffer for welldoing ; it is better to suffer for welldoing than for evildoing.

39. The question of suffering is one, in which we all have, and feel that we have, a profound personal interest. Where is the lover of suffering? Who would not gladly avoid it? It is not to be avoided. In this or that particular instance, as St. Peter indicates, God may will, or may not will, that we suffer. But no man is permitted to escape suffering altogether. It is a universal necessity. And as far as moral responsibility extends among mankind, so far, by an inflexible Divine ordination, all men suffer either as welldoers or as evildoers. We cannot settle it too soon with ourselves—for us, it is not a question of suffering or not suffering ; it is the alternative of suffering as the friends, or as the enemies, of God. Let each bethink himself—for it is the very reality of our case : I must, in my own person and history, either now suffer the tempered, temporary suffering in the flesh, by which the will of God is done in the good ; or I must suffer the punitive, uncomforted, and final suffering of those, whom the Son of Man regards as his adversaries, and whom He will destroy with the breath of his mouth at “his appearing and kingdom.”

40. The voice of the reason and judgment, as they contemplate this great alternative, is one and the same always. If it be so, at whatever cost or hazard, I will suffer as a welldoer. But the decision must be practical. It is possible to admire the ark, and to perish by the flood. Let us question ourselves. Have we felt the pang of renouncing this present evil world? Did it ever fall

within our experience to wrestle in strong contention with principalities and powers for our soul's peace, and to find it in the cross? Do we sympathise with the yearning of Christ over the souls for which He died? Are the wavering fortunes of the Gospel matter of sensitive interest with us? Our time, our property, our energies—does the Lord, who bought us, witness the consecration of them all to his service under the constraint of a holy passion? Remember—it is they who suffer with Christ, who are to reign with Him. We must drink of his cup, and be baptized with his Baptism; otherwise we are not morally qualified to partake of his glory.

41. And in all suffering as welldoers, be careful that the spiritual ends contemplated by it be not missed. Beware how you defraud either the church or the world of the benefit of your prayers, your heavenly mindedness, your patience, your zeal, your charity. The personal ends likewise—keep them steadily in view, and be unwearied in striving to compass them. You suffer, that you may learn how evil sin is; that you may die for ever to the world; that your will may be disciplined to a perfect concord with God; that you may be fitted for loftier service both on earth and in heaven. Let the Divine purpose be answered. Whatever the form of your suffering, whether persecution, or internal conflict, or direct trial of Providence, submit yourselves to God in welldoing. “Mortify your members, which are upon the earth.” Hate and resist sin with an energy, which shall wax stronger and stronger to the close of life. “Gird up the loins of your mind” to an unquestioning and cheerful execution of the will of Christ. The more for every visitation and touch of suffering, “arm yourselves with Christ's mind;” and let your life echo the language, in which that mind found its

perfect expression—"Father, not my will, but thine be done"!

42. Withal, be of good courage. Think it not strange, that you suffer. Let not affliction dismay you. It is no new thing, which has happened. You do but participate in the sufferings of Christ. Your brethren in the world are even as yourselves. And it is only for a while. "The last time" is at hand, and the "salvation is ready to be revealed." The season of suffering is dying out. The season of relief and recompense, which never dies, draws on apace. Already the shadows of the night begin to troop away, and the morning light is on the mountains. Rejoice, therefore, and be glad. "Be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." And doubt not, but be fully assured, that "the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, shall" then "be found unto" everlasting "praise and honour and glory."

God grant, that, in the day of the end, the flood, to us, may be salvation, not death; and that we all may be counted worthy of a place in the ark, through the merits of Christ our Redeemer, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever"! Amen.

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DEATH.

“FOR to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose, I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”—
PHILIPPIANS i. 21—24.

THE Bible is the paramount revelation of God to man. It is his supreme legislation. Yet it is not an elaborate system of dogma, or a precisely drawn code of law. It is annals, history, poetry, parable; most of all perhaps, it is the large and various record of the religious experience of a long succession of inspired persons, male and female, whom God has thus made the teachers of mankind for ever.

It is easy to see, how unsuitable a revelation of mere doctrine and statute would have been to us. Such a revelation would have proved repulsive, not attracting. It would have put God further away from man, rather than have brought Him near. As it is, the Bible brings God near; exhibiting Him not so much as the Infinitely Wise and True One, or as the Holy and Awful Lawgiver, but as dwelling with mankind upon the earth, and as communicating with his creatures in all condescension, benignity, and love. So, while the Scriptures are conspicuously divine, they are most attractively human. God draws us to Himself by “the cords of a man.” And what holy men of old knew, felt, and did in relation to God and

unseen things—the views which the Spirit gave them of the majesty and excellence of God; the praises which they offered to God by the same Spirit, the ends which, under the same supernatural enlightenment and influence, they proposed to themselves as the scope of life; and the glorious prospects beyond the grave, which they declare, opened to their view, when “the hand of the Lord” was upon them—become to us the infallible and authoritative word of God, true, perfect, and everlasting.

We have a notable example of this kind of inspired teaching in the text. Christ’s apostle, St. Paul, a man appointed and trained by God to be the chief founder of Gentile Christianity, and one of the two great New Testament expositors of the Gospel—St. John being the other—after a course of unexampled labour and suffering for Christ, is shut up in prison in Rome; and there, moved by the Holy Ghost, writes letters to various churches or individual believers, in whose welfare circumstances gave him a special interest. Amongst others, he directs the letter, from which the text is taken, to the Christian community at Philippi, where he and Silas had first planted the Gospel.

Many subjects are treated of in this prison epistle, to which reference need not now be made. In the beginning of it, however, there is a passage, which is closely knit up with the text, and explains it.

The Philippians had heard of the apostle’s imprisonment, and they grieved over it. They grieved for the sake of the apostle himself; they grieved also for the gospel’s sake. St. Paul adverts to these two grounds of their uneasiness. With respect to the gospel, he would have them understand, that the things which had befallen him had turned out rather to the furtherance than to the

hindering of it. And with regard to himself, the grace of God had sufficed him. He had not succumbed to his trial. On the contrary, Christ had been glorified, as aforetime, in all his humiliations and distresses. After speaking thus, he goes on to express his feeling and purpose concerning the future. He did not know what the future might be. He might live: he might die. All was uncertain. Nor was he greatly concerned. If he lived, he should live the life which he had long lived; Christ and Christ's cause in the world would be the alpha and omega of his being. And this would be heaven by anticipation. On the other hand, if he died, he should compass a still higher personal blessedness, for he should be for ever with the Lord. In fact, he found himself in a strait, and scarcely knew whether to desire to die or to live. For his own sake, no doubt, it would be better to depart. But for the Philippians' sake, for the sake of the churches in general, it would not be better. And this being so, he thought it likely that, in the Providence of God, he might continue to live, and might make yet fuller proof of his ministry as Christ's apostle to the Gentiles.

Now in all this we have precisely what has been spoken of. A man of like passions with ourselves relates his personal history, describes his personal feeling, and explains his personal intentions and hopes, to other men, also of like passions with us; his words, meanwhile, being those of an inspired person, formally and authoritatively addressing Christ's servants on the great matters of the common salvation—addressing them in language, which the contemporary Church recognized as the voice of God: and, as the nature of the case and a large analogy show, under the homely guise of St. Paul's experience as a Christian and an evangelist, Divine doctrine and Divine law are

here set forth for the religious enlightenment, consolation, and guidance of mankind for ever.

I.

The apostle's language exhibits the proper Scope and Character of all truly Christian Life.

Such life is never aimless. Are there no aimless lives? Certainly there are those, which give the impression of aimlessness. So far as observation can determine, they have no guiding principle, no fixed plan, no definite end in view. They follow now this object, now the other, as humour, or the interest of the moment, may dictate. Vessels without rudder; stars plunging on in the dark, without any visible force to guide their motion—these are the images, which best describe the lives we speak of. Alas! how many human beings could give no rational answer to the question—What are you living for? The Christian life, in all its forms and stages, has always a definite object before it.

Its aim, however, does not lie within the circle of the seen and temporary. Severe analysis would probably resolve the ostensibly aimless life into certain purely selfish and mundane elements. Strictly speaking, perhaps, no man's life is altogether objectless. Be this as it may, it is quite certain that countless multitudes of mankind live precisely as if this transitory world were the total of human existence and of human interests. They aim simply and exclusively at "the things which are seen." They know no other sphere of being, and desire no other. Now, while no well-ordered Christian life is indifferent to the claims of the present world, its ambition invariably pitches higher. The spiritual, the invisible, the ever-

lasting—these are the objects, towards which its solitudes mainly gravitate.

In a word, as the text suggests, the end and substance of the Christian life is Christ. A travesty and caricature of this doctrine is just now a commonplace of the popular religionism. “Christianity is Christ:” not creeds, not worships, not churches—only Christ. If the meaning be—and this is sometimes the meaning—that it is not of much moment what we believe, or how we pray, or whether we are connected or not with the visible communion of Christians, nothing can be more palpably weak and absurd; for what is Christ to the man, who has no definite belief concerning Him, to whom it is matter of indifference how he approaches Him, and in whose estimation Christ’s most distinct injunctions are of no practical account whatever? On the other hand, if the sentiment intends no more than that formula, rite, and church alliance are all as nothing without a personal fellowship of the soul with the Redeemer, this is most true. But then the doctrine is no novelty, to be paraded before the eyes of the world; still less ought it to be flourished as a weapon of offence in the face of the Church of Christ; for this is what spiritual men have held from the beginning, and in the nature of things, Christianity, as so explained, can never be anything else but Christ. If in any worthy sense Christians, we shall believe Christ’s words; we shall take refuge in his cross; we shall follow his example; we shall wait for his coming again as the Judge of quick and dead. So understood, it is almost a truism that Christianity is Christ.

The text, however, supposes the possibility of a life, which, while in a sense Christ, shall not be such in the full and proper value of the term. The apostle has

spoken just before of Christians, who were insincere, contentious, strife-loving. And what a pedigree of nearer or remoter kin bridges the distance between St. Paul's days and our own—men whose life is Christ, and not Christ : Christ a little, something besides not a little ; Christ on occasion, not in continuance ; Christ predominantly, it may be, but not wholly, absolutely, and undividedly Christ !

Plainly the question is not so much one of kind as of degree. It is not matter of faith or scepticism, of true belief or heresy, of loyal subjection to Christ or of traitorousness and war against Him. Rather it is a question of earnest as against slovenly faith, of burning and abounding love as against an affection which is dull and sluggish, of universal consecration as distinguished from constrained, reserved, and partial service. With him whose life is Christ, whatever other objects may provoke his curiosity or occupy his thought, the person, doctrine, and redeeming work of the Incarnate Word of God will be the central sun of the intellectual universe. Whatever other claims the nature of things, and the course of Providence, may establish upon his sympathies, his supreme devotion will be rendered to Him, who loved him and gave Himself for him. And the work of his mind, and the work of his hands, will be the work of Christ, in all self-abnegation, longsuffering, diligence, zeal, and charity. Christ will not always be in the thought of him whose life is Christ, nor will he pass his days in a delirium of longing after Him. But he will make it his business to act precisely as if Christ, in his person, offices, and claims, were all that the Holy Word represents Him to be ; and, with a real and abiding faith in Him, he will follow everywhere the lead of his Divine doctrine and example.

The apostle's language, however, teaches us further :

II.

What Christian Death is, and how it ought to be regarded.

He had told the Philippians how he purposed to live, supposing him to live. But then he might die. The moment was critical, and, not impossibly, "the lion" might crush him. How if he died? He tells them how. To him, as a servant of Christ, death would be "gain." Christian Life is Christ; and Christian Death—paradoxical though it may seem—is something still better. This is the apostle's affirmation.

It is Christian Death, of which St. Paul speaks. Yet we cannot but be struck profoundly by an assumption which he makes concerning death in general. If not in form, at least in fact, he delivers an oracle respecting death as death. "To me to live," he says, "is Christ, and to die is gain." Then he proceeds—"But if I live in the flesh." What does this mean? Is dying living, only not in the flesh. This is exactly what the apostle intends. It is as if he corrected himself, and would speak more precisely, lest any should understand him as conveying, that death was a ceasing to live. It is simply cessation of life in the flesh, not of life altogether. Observe it. That mysterious, dolorous thing, which we call death, is not death. Is there not a spirit in man? We know it, we are conscious of it; though we have never seen it. And shall we conclude, that the spirit, after death, does not live, because we cannot see it live? How can we see the life of that which, by its very nature, is not to be seen? He who made the spirit can surely keep it alive, if He will, amidst all changes. He declares, that this is his will. And so "all live unto God." Yes: properly speaking, there

is not a human being dead. How and where the great congregation of those, whom we call dead, live, is a secret, which time will not divulge. But the Gospel declares them to be alive; and our spiritual instinct and intelligence approve the doctrine.

The life out of the flesh, the apostle teaches, which Christians live, is a higher and more advanced life than that of the present world. Death, to them, is not simply altered life. It is life elevated and ennobled. It is gain, as compared with their life in the flesh.

Not that there is anything essentially evil or degrading in the flesh. The Scriptures nowhere countenance this ancient philosophic dogma. Where their language seems to favour it, they mean no more than that the flesh is commonly the organ, through which the evil of the spirit acts, or the avenue whereby temptation finds its way into the soul. The body, in itself, is not a moral leprosy and curse. Nor does the dropping of the body, as such, set the soul at large, and enable it to rise to less embarrassed and more vigorous service as the minister of God. It is quite conceivable, that the highest state of life, to which human nature can attain, may be one, in which the body must be present; and Divine Revelation informs us, that this will be the fact.

But as the elements of our nature now are—the flesh what it is, the spirit what it is, and the relations between them such as obtain in this world—the body is a clog and prison to the soul. It limits it, thralls it, cripples it, harasses it, sometimes agonizes it. At best, it disqualifies it, in a thousand ways, for giving full expression to its feeling and will, even when occupied in the most lofty duties, and intent on securing the wisest, worthiest, and most hallowed ends. With those, therefore, who love

Christ, death will obviously be so far gain, that it will clear away a throng of hindrances to the free and unfettered consecration of the soul to God. What liberation, what expansion, may result from this alone, who is to conjecture? And what access of intelligence, what heightening and enhancement of all the powers and faculties of the soul, what rise in the scale of creature-being may, by the appointment of God, be involved in a Christian's dying, experience alone can enable us to ascertain.

But we are not left by the apostle with the general assurance, that Christian death is an advance upon Christian life. The preeminence is defined as consisting in the fact, that for a Christian to depart from the flesh is to be with Christ.

It is inevitable to remark, with this doctrine in view, that in most vital senses, believers in Christ are already with Him. "Joined to Him;" "built upon Him;" "grafted into Him;" "He in them and they in Him;" not ideally, but mystically—so close is the union—"one with Christ," in such wise one, that they "live no longer;" but the life which they live in the flesh is Christ's life, not their own: thus all true Christians are already with Christ.

Yet it is equally manifest that, in other and most important respects, we are at present not with Him. He is beyond the reach of our sense. There is a veil upon the glory of his person. The pomp and splendour of his celestial state are curtained off and hidden. The fact of his government, and the principles upon which it is conducted, discover themselves only partially and obscurely. In his dealing with his Church, clouds and darkness not unfrequently compass his throne. The life of individual believers, too, calls for the constant exercise of faith.

The doctrine of the Gospel is not so clear, as to leave no room for questions. The knowledge of our sonship is liable to disturbance and eclipse. The conditions of the Christian life are often such as to make it difficult to comprehend, how the sin-hating, gracious Christ, and not accident, or caprice, or hard, imperious will, is Lord of heaven and earth. Hence ignorance, perplexity, disquiet, sorrow—all because Christ does not fully reveal Himself, because, in other words, his servants are not with Him.

Death raises the saint to be with Christ. It is possible, we may encounter a difficulty here. Some Scriptures speak, as if we should not be with Christ until the last day. Others, like the text, declare explicitly, that we shall be with Him as soon as we depart hence. There is no contradiction. In our Father's house are many mansions; and there is a nearer and a remoter association with Christ in the unseen world. We may be nearer to Him after the resurrection—we shall be nearer—than in interval between death and that stupendous event of the future. But if the words of our passage have any meaning, the union between Christ and his people does not belong to the far off ages alone. It has its birthday in their death. Escaped from the flesh, which to them is "the bondage of corruption," they are straightway with Him—the curtain drawn; the disguise and obscuration at an end; the long-standing puzzles solved and scattered; the truth of God shining with noonday illumination upon the soul; the unrest and anguish of earth swallowed up in the perfect revelation of God's paternal love; their whole nature lifted beyond the needs, the weaknesses, and the perils of their probationary life; in the fellowship of angels and of glorified human spirits, day and night—where there is no night—made glad with the beatific

vision of their Lord, and for ever counted worthy to dwell among the sanctities of his holy habitation.

The apostle does not attempt to measure the pre-eminence, which Christian Death is hereby seen to have over Christian Life. He is content with a general statement of its exceeding superiority. His words can hardly be put into any other than their original language. What is Christian Death compared with Christian Life? It is better; it is much better; it is "much more than much better."

And thus we are brought to the last great point involved in the text.

It puts Christian Life and Death before us, regarded as an Alternative.

Viewed in relation to human knowledge, they always are an alternative; and it is the duty of Christians to deal with them as such. At the same time, we commonly desire one of the two in distinct preference to the other. In some rare cases, perhaps, like St. Paul, we may be in a strait, and can scarcely determine towards which side the balance of desire inclines. The apostle's language instructs us, how we ought to behave ourselves under the various attitudes which Christian feeling may hold towards the alternative of Life in the flesh and of Life with the Lord.

Ordinarily, even Christians recoil from death. This is partly, it may be chiefly, for want of an adequate faith. We do not believe the things which we believe; and perfect love has not cast out fear. But there is also a physical shrinking from death. It is repulsive, sometimes painful. All beyond is mystery; and, like children, we are afraid of the dark. The light too is sweet; and every age, and almost every condition, is bound up with good,

from which it is loath to part. Even of those who are best prepared to die, few can be found, to whom it is unwelcome to live.

Nor, within certain limits, is the desire of life blameworthy. Such a sense of the blessedness of heaven as should spoil earth to us, is nowhere bidden or encouraged in Scripture; and it would be plainly incompatible with the duties, which we owe to God and to one another. Moreover, in many cases, so far as our finite wisdom can determine, it is infinitely desirable, if not for our own sake, at least for that of others, that we should live, and not die. And the conviction of this may create an eager longing for life, even in the holiest of men.

What the doctrine of the text inculcates is that, whether life be less or more desirable, less or more desired, it should be spent under the strong and penetrating assurance, that "to die is gain." It is supposed, of course, that our life is Christ. If this be not so, we have no warrant for expecting that death would bring any advantage. On the contrary, it would most assuredly be our undoing; and fear of it will be as becoming as it is natural. But with this proviso, it is our right and our duty to anticipate death as an immeasurable good. We need not be, we ought not to be, in bondage because of it. We may very well look forward to it with awe and solemnity. But let it not be an object of terror. Fear is weakness; and "God has not given us the spirit of timidity, but of love, and of power and of a sound mind." You calculate upon death as certain. Reckon of it always as an evil, which the cross of Christ has transmuted into blessing; as, in fact, a momentary darkness, which will for ever heighten to your view the glory of that Blessed Face, from which it will withdraw the veil.

St. Paul desired to depart. For his own sake, he had this desire. It was not so much, because the world was bad, and that the tasks of his ministry were burdensome. Rather it was, because he knew the glory of the world to which death would raise him, and how vast and enduring joy awaited him, where Christ was. No wonder that such a one as "Paul the aged, the prisoner of Jesus Christ," longed for the heaven, where, "in the body or out of the body," he had once been for a season, and had looked upon, and heard the "unspeakable things."

The feeling, as it possessed the apostle, was a right one. Naturally and fittingly his personal preference was in favour of dying. And there are cases, in which the same preference for death rather than life may very properly obtain in Christian hearts. The martyr at the stake; the confessor in the dungeon; the saint in his mortal sickness, struggling with pain and temptation; the disciple worn out with care and labour, on whom the years are come, which have no pleasure in them—who can forbid, that any one of these should cry out, in humble resignation to the will of God, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly"?

In the course of human affairs, too, circumstances may arise, which shall beget in Christians a desire to die, when that desire will be much less commendable and legitimate. Let some dreadful bereavement, for example, overtake us in the Providence of God. What is life to us then? We stand by the wreck of ourselves, and we wring our hands in anguish, and protest, O God, I would die, and not live! Such a feeling as this needs to be discouraged and repressed. It may be simply the natural wail of a bruised and shattered spirit. It may possibly be little more than a thoughtless or even selfish impatience to escape from

burdens, which others must carry, if we do not. It will almost certainly be the voice of our ignorance, petitioning that we may be lifted forthwith to a heaven, for which we are not morally qualified. At best, it can have little in common with that tranquil, lowly, reverential desire for death, which possessed St. Paul.

The lesson which the apostle would impress upon us, is not difficult to read. Granting, he would say, that, in any given circumstances, death is better than life, let it not be forgotten, that, if the will of God ordain us life, it is an unspeakable grace to live, and not die. "To me to die is gain," he affirms. "But if I live in the flesh"—he proceeds—"this is the fruit of my labour." In other words—continued life on the earth is, in my purpose, to go on doing the work of Christ; and that I reckon to be its own most exceeding reward. I shall sow with one hand, it may be still amidst many tears, the seed of the kingdom. I shall certainly reap with the other a harvest of joy and blessing, such as will more than compensate for all my toil. Life, in my account—he means—is a service for the blessed Master, the fruit of which is even now so ample, that I can well afford to wait awhile for everlasting life. If it is better, as indeed it is, for the faithful servant to depart, it is yet a glorious privilege to stay on earth, and do the self-recompensing work of those, whose life is Christ.

Here, then, is our lesson. Be death ever so desirable, it is our own fault, if the happiness of life does not more than counterbalance the trial of it. Are the knowledge of Christian truth, the communion of the soul with God, the labour of evangelical charity, the brotherhood of saints, all graces of so small account, that we can justify ourselves in complaining, if paradise is not at once thrown

open to us? Surely we are not ignorant, that a course of Providential and spiritual training is necessary, in order to the worthy fulfilment of the duties of eternity. For a Christian, scarcely any greater calamity is imaginable, than that, in compliance with his peevish importunities, God should put him prematurely in possession of his final home. Other things being equal, the more life, the more heaven. Nay, if only for the sake of our fellow men, and of the cause of God on earth—the apostle’s language and example both emphatically teach us—it may be our duty to suppress the longing for eternal life, and to accept with joyfulness the Divine decree, which bids us labour and suffer in hope of a salvation by and by to be revealed. Life is not a piece of duration, to be hurried through with all possible speed. It is the school of discipline for our immortal manhood. God gives us in this world opportunities, which will never recur, of showing forth his praise, of manifesting our love to Him amongst his enemies, and of helping to bring back to his authority a revolted province of his great dominion. And blessed are those servants, whom He calls, as He called the apostle of Tarsus, to a protracted life of labour and suffering for his name, and whom a long postponed departure from the flesh carries into the joy of the Lord. These are “the kings” of the celestial city; and the glory of their crowns shall as far exceed that of their brethren, as “the brightness of the firmament” is outdone by the starry flames which illuminate it.

The servant, who is both “faithful and wise,” whatever his predilections may be, will submit himself humbly and cheerfully to the will of his Lord. If death be his desire, he will notwithstanding acquiesce in the decision, which appoints him life. If he would fain continue still to live,

he will not resent the ordinance, which requires him to die. Why should he, to whom Christ is all and in all, be reluctant to be with Him, where He is? And why should one, who knows indeed that his name is written in heaven, be fretful or impatient, because he is kept waiting awhile at the palace gate? "Not my will, but thine, be done!" Such will be the language of affectionate loyalty, with which the heart of every true disciple will respond to the Divine behest, however much it may come into conflict with his personal inclinations. Happy they, who are at once so strongly enamoured of the holy work of earth, and of the holy rest of heaven, as to be compelled to say, We are in a strait betwixt the two!

How startling a contrast the current life of man on the earth forms with the lofty ideal, presented by St. Paul in the text! Sordid care, scarce lifting its eyes above the dust and the mire. Adoration of self, which wastes the flesh, debases the intellect, and wrecks the soul. Weary climbing up miserable molehills of conceit and ambition, with Alp on Alp of Divine felicity and honour close at hand, their tops radiant with the blaze of everlasting life. Mad dance and song, while the sun shines: then forth into the dark to meet the dread realities, which never slack their pace because they are forgotten. Is this too sombre a picture of the earthly history of thousands of mankind—among them, even of some who bear the sacred name of Christ?

And where this august profession is more than a profession, how rare is the type of character, which answers to the apostolic model? Where shall we find the men of one sole thought and purpose; with whom the God-born, sin-atonement, holy, blessed Christ is "first, last, midst, and

without end ;” to whose spirits Christ is the spring and focus of all intellectual activity, the ruling element of their affection, desire, and hope—the men, who would not think it worth their while to live, unless they saw and felt the living Christ in all earthly things, and who calculate with jubilant anticipation upon death, as the signal and minister of their everlasting companionship with Him ? Where are the believers in the Lord of Calvary and of the Holy Place not made with hands, whom all men recognise as ruled by one idea ; of whom the most sceptical and indifferent are not in doubt, that they do veritably walk with Jesus ; and whose own hearts bear them witness in the Holy Ghost, that, the world being crucified to them and they to the world, they live no longer, but Christ in them, the hope of glory ? Where are even the ministers of Christ, who maintain this moral and religious altitude, and are in very deed one with their Divine Master, and his immortal cause ?

Yet this same life, pourtrayed by the apostle, is the only rational, secure, and happy life for man to live. If Christ really stands towards us in the relations, under which the Scripture represents Him ; if, as matter of fact, He has redeemed us from death everlasting, at the cost of his own most precious blood ; if He requires of us, at the peril of our salvation, that we renounce the world, and carry the cross in his footsteps ; if He will by and by appear as the Judge of mankind, and will deal with all men in final retribution ; then we abdicate our manhood, and are guilty of sin and folly, such as no language can characterize, if our life be not Christ. Plainly then, whatever it may be, how comely, dignified, refined, and brilliant soever, our life is an illusion—it is but death dressed out in the habiliments and drapery of life ; and unless we

come to ourselves, and amend our doings, it were good for us, that we had not been born. If possible, still more emphatically does all this hold of those who profess themselves the disciples of Christ; for to be a Christian and not a Christian, to put oneself with one hand upon the altar of sacrifice, and to withdraw the gift with the other, involves an inconsistency, a risk, and a disquiet of soul, which will cause the very shadow of death to fall upon the days of our discipleship, a shadow too surely presaging the deeper darkness of which it is the herald. Therefore let our life be Christ. If hitherto we have followed the vain course of this world, let heaven and earth alike witness our unfeigned repentance, and solemn consecration of ourselves to the service of our Redeemer. In like manner, if the past of our so called Christian career will not bear inspection, if our consciences tell us that it has been practically a halting between two opinions, let us resolve, the grace of God assisting us, that the future shall see us "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" having a single eye, occupied with one business—nothing besides; looking earnestly upward for the coming of Christ, and the final gathering of the Church to Him. So shall we able, as all faithful Christians are, to echo the words of St. Paul, and to say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." And if circumstances be not such as to kindle in us a vehement desire to depart, we shall be ready to die, if God wills it; the horizon of life will be bright with the gleaming of eternal bliss; and whenever death shall occur, it will be our joyful awaking and birth into true and proper life, the life of God, and of God's own glorious kingdom, for ever and ever.

THE DOUBLE HARVEST.

“BE not deceived ; God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”—GALATIANS vi. 7, 8.

THERE is nothing more wonderful, or more certain, than the intimate connection which subsists, under the government of God, between things great and little. We see this in nature. The stars of the heaven have to do with the wellbeing of the meanest insect or flower, that tenants the earth ; and the fall of that flower, or the flitting of that insect, affects the poise and balance of the universe. So it is with the operations of Providence. On the one hand, its most stupendous machinery is adjusted to the interests of individual human beings. On the other hand, the most trivial occurrence in a lifetime may influence the world at large throughout all ages. What, for example, could be less important, than that the father of an Eastern family should bid a son look after the condition of his brethren and the sheep at Shechem ? Yet that command of Jacob carried Joseph almost to the throne of Egypt, and became the parent of a series of events, altogether without parallel for consequence in human history.

Nowhere, however, is this interlacing of the great and small more real, or more conspicuous, than in that moral administration which God exercises over his creatures,

an administration of which Nature and Providence, so called, are only elements and ministers. The very opening page in the Scripture record of God's dealings with men reads out the doctrine with imperial emphasis. The question of the eating of a fruit is the question of a fallen or unfallen world. And every after page of the Inspired Volume abounds with illustration of the same great doctrine.

We have a striking example in the text. St. Paul exhorts certain Asiatic Christians to make just provision for the temporal necessities of those, who ministered to them in the things of God. At first sight, a duty of but small account, perhaps, whether in the breach or the observance. But no. Here little clasps hands with great. Where spiritual character and Christian morals are concerned, there is no little. We lift our eyes: the apostle's finger points no longer to the narrow circle of a special obligation: he directs our gaze towards glorious orbits of truth, high and lifted up, like the wheels in Ezekiel's vision; and in words full of solemn import he instructs us, that on ground like this, the little and the great are vitally and everlastingly one. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Thus our attention is challenged, in the first place, to the doctrine that:

I.

Our Present Life is a Moral Trial for Another to Come.

So far as we are masters of our own actions, they are

none of them self-contained ; they do not end with themselves. A stone is what we see it to be, and nothing besides. It cannot swell and grow into anything else. It is incapable of development. It yields no new produce out of its own substance. Human actions are not stones ; they are seeds. Every one of them has a germ and a principle of life in it. It may be the offspring of the passions, the tongue, the mind. It may fall directly within the province of religion, or may form part of our daily intercourse with mankind, or may be strictly personal and private. Others may see it ; none but God may see it. It does not matter. It has the faculty of growth. More than that—it grows ; it cannot but grow. No force or chance can hinder it from growing. It falls infallibly into ground, where it as infallibly springs up, and brings forth fruit after its kind. Our life is a seed-sowing. We sow ; we all sow ; we ever sow. And what we sow, be it less or more, be it of one sort or another—that same, in the issue of things, by an absolute, unchangeable necessity, men always reap.

Strip the apostle's language of its figurative vesture, and we have the doctrine just now stated. Our life in this world is a probation for a life beyond. Were there any doubt as to the meaning, the introductory words of the passage, "God is not mocked," would supply us with the key. We are creatures of God, and subjects not only of his natural, but also of his moral dominion. He has made us capable of knowing Him, of being like Him, of willing to do as He wills. Moreover, the capacity involves the duty. By the very constitution of our nature we are bound to acquaint ourselves with God, to honour, love, worship, and glorify Him. At the same time the ability to do this carries in its train the ability to leave it undone.

We live under no absolute natural compulsion to answer the design of the Creator. We may ignore his will; we may defy it. Not, however, with impunity. Under pain of his awful and final displeasure, God requires of us, and charges us, that we act in concert with Him, and make his will the end of our being.

Thus we are responsible to God. He takes cognizance of our behaviour. No part of it is matter of indifference with Him. It has all some moral quality in his sight. He is blind to none of our doings; for his eyes are in every place, and they search the heart. He forgets nothing that we do: all is treasured up in his boundless, bottomless memory. And whether we do well or ill during our mortal life, and whether our well or evil doing be less or more in point of magnitude and continuance—according to our deeds we shall receive, when life is ended, a perfect “recompense of reward” at the hands of the righteous Judge of men. “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” So the Old Testament speaks. And the New Testament repeats the oracle in its own diviner dialect. “For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” On till death is our seed-sowing: after death is the sure and universal harvest. On till death is our moral trial: after death is the life of judicial retribution, alike for the just and for the unjust. This is the doctrine of the text in the most general statement of it; a doctrine endorsed with the utmost distinctness by the conscience of man, and by many analogies in God’s Providential government of the world.

But, more particularly, the apostle’s language affirms, that:

II.

Human Life has one or the other of Two great Characters, and will issue in one or the other of Two great Results.

That part of the text, which we have just considered, argues and establishes the truth contained in the words preceding it. "God is not mocked" by the niggardliness, the self-seeking, and the injustice of his professing Church, still less by the scorn and hostility of his enemies. How can He be, when, under his irresistible sway, all human actions, whatever their moral quality, bring forth their fruit in their season? It is impossible that men should mock God; "*for* whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." But now we encounter a second *for*; one which is confirmative, like the former, though not in precisely the same way. It confirms by expounding. It alleges the truth of the whole by alleging the truth of its parts. All men without exception will eventually reap what they have sown; "*for* he that soweth to his flesh shall of his flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." There are none who do not sow—the apostle assumes. And the sowing is twofold: all sow, either to their flesh or to the Spirit. And there are none who do not reap. The harvest is twofold, like the seed-sowing; twofold only. The sowers all reap, either corruption on the one hand, or eternal life on the other.

The apostle speaks in figure, and his language has been strangely misinterpreted, as though he would describe the "flesh" and "Spirit" as the fields, into which, respectively, men cast the seed they sow. But, not to urge the incongruity of such a representation, as it affects the Holy

Spirit, and not to insist, that it is the quality of the seed, rather than the nature of the soil, which determines of what kind a crop shall be ; the whole scope of the passage, and in particular the words of verse seven—" whatsoever," in point of quality, that is to say, "a man soweth, that shall he also reap,"—which are here enlarged and explained, made it evident, that St. Paul intends to mark, not the various sorts of ground, into which the sowers cast their seed, but the different kinds of seed which they sow.

There is but one field. Earth, the present world, the term and space of human life—this is the single field, into which all sow in common. But the seed is not the same. Some sow to their flesh ; in other words, sow seed, which is related to the flesh, as being the growth and produce of it, and which is therefore fleshly in its character. Others sow to the Spirit ; sow, namely, that which, in like manner, is related to the Spirit, and thus has a spiritual nature and quality.

And this division the apostle would have us understand to be exhaustive. All sow that which is flesh, because it springs of the flesh, or that which is Spirit, as having its origin and parentage in the Spirit.

Need we explain what is meant by "the flesh" and "the Spirit"? We fear the sentiment obtains but too widely in the Christian Church, that by these expressions we are to understand two constituent elements of human nature—the one, the flesh, evil, because it prompts to the gratification of merely carnal desires and appetites ; the other, the Spirit, good, as encouraging the soul to piety and virtue—and that, in this world, at least, these two forces must of necessity coexist and act within us, although one of them will commonly be in the ascendant, and will give form to our character and habit of life.

This theory has no warrant, either of the text, or of any other Scripture. It is right, indeed, in its ethical estimate of the flesh and the Spirit as representing evil or good, which operates in man. But in other respects it is seriously at fault, and even stands in direct opposition to the unvarying doctrine of Scripture.

We do not deny, of course, that good often works in evil men. There is a sense, in which this is all but universally true. On the other hand it must be acknowledged, that where goodness is predominant, it is frequently so mixed up with elements of evil, that, as St. Paul said of the uncharitable, self-seeking Corinthians, the subjects of it are "yet carnal." Still there is nothing in the Scriptures like the theory in question. They recognise but one innate, constitutional element of men's moral nature. That which is naturally born of Adam's race is not, religiously considered, a heterogeneous complex of flesh and Spirit. It is simply and merely flesh. Such has been the effect of the fall, that the entire bent and tendency of our nature, so far as duty to God is concerned, is wholly evil. "In us, that is, in our flesh"—observe here, how the sacred writer identifies the flesh with our native and unaltered selves!—"dwelleth no good thing." The flesh, as the text very significantly puts it, is "our own." We inherit it. We bring it into the world with us. It possesses, rules, and characterises us. Naturally, we have nothing to do with the Spirit. Let us follow nature—nature in its proper bias and prompting, uninfluenced by forces from without—we live to ourselves; we fulfil the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, which is at once the poisoner and victim of the flesh; we lose sight of all that is spiritual, divine, and everlasting; we are incapable of pleasing God, for it is the very genius of the flesh to be in hostility to

Him. And such is the state of all men, according to the Scriptures, except so far as they experience a second birth from above, by the renovating power of the Holy Ghost.

We call particular attention to this. The case of those of mankind apart, who have never committed actual sin—and as to these, the Bible has no formal, though indeed it has most precious implicit teaching—the difference between fleshly and spiritual men is essentially, though not exclusively, a historical difference. It lies in the fact, that the former are in their natural moral condition, while the latter have “passed from death unto life,” and “from the power of Satan unto God.” Men only become truly spiritual, in the representation of Scripture, when they believe in Christ with the heart unto righteousness, and when the Spirit of God regenerates them after the image of God. “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born of God.” “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

The flesh and the spirit, therefore, are not coordinate good and evil principles, which men bring into the world with them, and which, as long as they remain on earth, are inseparable from their moral constitution. The flesh, and that alone, is nature. The Spirit is an after and a supernatural creation. It is a condition of the soul, which is foreign to it. It is a celestial life, which may be naturalized indeed, but is not homeborn. It is, in a word, the gift of God to all those who believe in his Son, whom He hath sent.

It is possible to raise a multitude of questions over the

doctrine. How far is man ever found in a state of nature? To what extent may Divine grace operate in the human soul, and yet leave it unregenerate? What are the preparations and conditions, the absolutely certain vouchers and signatures, of the spiritual birth? Where is the point, at which a revived carnality will smother and extinguish the life of God in the soul? These and other questions may be asked; and some of them must remain unanswered. But the general distinction is clear. A sharp line defines it. He is in the flesh, who has not been "born again of the Spirit," through personal acceptance of Christ's salvation. He is in the Spirit, who has accepted this salvation, and so has been "renewed in the spirit of his mind" by the power of God.

And thus we see at once, both who they are, who sow to the flesh and to the Spirit respectively, and how, in the nature of things, these two classes of sowers divide the world. They sow to the flesh, who live under the influence of their natural inclinations and desires, pleasing only themselves, and despising or neglecting the holy will of God. They live to the Spirit, the whole current of whose being has been supernaturally reversed under the grace of the Gospel, and who "glorify God with their bodies and spirits, which are his." And there is no room for an intermediate position. The Bible recognises no such position. It is a question of the will and the heart; and as matter of fact, these are and must be either "after the flesh" or "after the Spirit."

The Seed-sowing is twofold. Twofold also is the Harvest. "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

What is life? To know God; to be in amity with God;

to be morally like God ; to obey God ; to delight in God—this, as the Scriptures explain, is life. And the sowers to the Spirit live. “The Spirit quickeneth.” He is “the lord and giver of life.” To be born of Him is to “live unto God.” And this true and proper life of man, in its maturity and full perfection, is the great and glorious reward, which, by Divine appointment, shall eventually crown the labours of the sowers to the Spirit. Few words are needed to describe it. Ennobled existence : blessed existence : everlastingly ennobled and blessed existence—this is the harvest of the just. Our present capacities of acquaintance with God indefinitely heightened, amidst vastly enlarged revelations of his glory. The gracious communications, which God now holds with us, exalted to an intimacy rivalling that of the angels. The image of God, as it is reproduced by the Spirit in every Christian believer,—the image of his purity, truth, and goodness—assuming a radiance, which shall exclude all blurr and dimness. The ecstatic worship and service of God, without end of days, where “the former things are passed away,” and where God Himself lives among his own in supreme delight and felicity. This is the joyful and limitless harvest of life, which those shall gather, into whose hands, in that great and notable day, the Lord of the worlds shall put the golden sickle, saying, “Ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom.”

But there is a dark alternative. “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.”

“I went down to the bottom of the mountains,” says the prophet Jonah, “yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God !” “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” is the voice of a Psalmist, “who redeemeth thy life from destruction.” Corruption is destruction, death, the

antithesis of life. Here it is the antithesis of life in its strictest and loftiest sense. Not non-existence. If God spake truly, the first human transgressors died. They did not cease to exist. Ignorance of God, variance with God, unlikeness to God, rebellion against God, misery under the frown of God—this is death. The sowers to their flesh sow seed which brings forth death. “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.” Even now their life is death in rudiment; and in the end, they must reap it in its full and eternal development. Degraded existence: miserable existence; everlastingly degraded and miserable existence—such is the harvest of corruption to be reaped by those, into whose hands the Judge of the earth shall by and by put the iron sickle of his holy and avenging displeasure. Shall we dwell upon it? Let it be but for a moment. Full consciousness of being, but of being surrounded by circumstances of humiliation and woe. The stars gone out in the spiritual firmament, and only “the outer darkness” left. God’s glory lost past all recovery, and his terrible anger in its room. The Divine purpose in our creation frustrated; and in place of everlasting life,—our proper “vocation of God”—that absolutely measureless privation, calamity, and penal chastisement, which the Scriptures call “the second death.” It is matter for thought, not words. Let no man neglect to ponder it. And this the more, because, according to the apostle:

III.

We are liable to Delusions, with respect to these great verities.

“Be not deceived: God is not mocked.”

Sublime and tremendous as are the sanctions of human life, it is painfully familiar, that great numbers of mankind

habitually sow to their flesh. They are not only content to follow nature. They prefer to do it. They deliberately set aside the claims of religion, and choose to spend their days on earth in the pursuit and worship of their own hearts' desire. And this, not merely where the knowledge of God is vague and perplexed, but under the broadest lights, and amidst the most exceptional grace, of the evangelical revelation.

What account is to be given of this wonderful phenomenon? It is only to be explained on one principle. Men act thus under the influence of spiritual blindness and error. They do not understand God, nor the relations which they hold to Him, nor the obligations which spring out of those relations. They do not perceive, how evil a thing it is to defraud God of his rights in their homage and obedience. Intent upon the present, they shut their eyes against the unwelcome light, which discloses the future. The fact that the multitude take the same path with themselves, encourages their misdoing. They observe, likewise, that punishment for sin is often long postponed; and they venture to believe, that, in their own case, the postponement may be final. Perhaps they find courage to persuade themselves, that God does not really mean what He says, when He threatens transgressors with his wrath; or that the future punishment of sin will be less dreadful than the letter of the Bible represents it. It may be they have even hardihood enough to give the lie direct to Jesus Christ, and to wrap their fears up in the comfortable fiction, that everlasting death will have an end. All history and experience teem with illustration of the spiritual spells and juggleries, which men, prompted by the invisible potentate of evil, practise upon themselves; that so they may reduce, to their convictions, the sinful-

ness of sin, and may tone the booming of the great bell of Scripture menace down to the gentle whisper of an amiable reprimand.

But all this—the apostle reminds us—is a mocking of God, who “is not mocked.” The obligations of religion are not conventional; they grow out of the nature of things, and are for ever absolute and peremptory. The evil of sin is no artificial creation of the Divine Lawgiver. God being what He is, and man what he is, sin must be what the Scriptures declare it to be, both in its nature and in its consequences. It is treason against the all-perfect government of the all perfect Being. It is violation of the moral order and integrity of the universe. It is trespass upon the rights and privileges of God’s great family in heaven and earth. It is refusal to accept the responsibilities, and to enjoy the blessings, which are involved in the very relation of a creature to the Creator. It is the voluntary exile and criminal suicide of an immortal spirit, which the Maker of it called to live with Him in everlasting joy and felicity. Of necessity, therefore, to sow to the flesh is to die. Were the veracity of God unpledged to the destruction of sinners, their destruction would not be the less certain. It is, in fact, his goodness which threatens evildoers with wrath. Threatened or unthreatened, the harvest of sin is inevitably corruption. The accordant voices of all holy creatures throughout the worlds demand it. Eternal truth and justice, nay, the very love and pity of God, require that it should be so. God Himself would cease to be God, were it otherwise. By an unchangeable compulsion, founded in the absolute and eternal coincidence between the nature of things and the will of God, God is not mocked, when He declares, that, while those who sow to the Spirit shall live for ever,

the sowers to the flesh shall die with a conscious, spiritual death, from which there shall be no rising again. Men may treat God—they continually do so—as if He were such a one as themselves; and as if through inadvertence, unconcern, or administrative weakness, He would permit sin to go unpunished. Let us not be deceived. He will not be trifled with. Doing well, we shall in due season receive the reward of welldoing. But doing not well, we shall “fall into the hands of the living God.” And where is the ransom price, or the Saviour, that shall deliver us?

The apostle’s doctrine concerns every single hearer of the Gospel. Each one of us, at this present time, is either sowing to his flesh or to the Spirit, and so is preparing day by day, and hour by hour, his own sure and unalterable destiny. How important that we should understand ourselves, and not drift on in the dark! Let us question our own souls. Are we morally and religiously what we were when we first became responsible, or have “the powers of the world to come” wrought in us a holy renovation? Is the stream of our feeling and conduct determined by our own natural will, or, contrary to nature, does the will of God exercise an habitual jurisdiction over us? Have we, or have we not, for a longer or shorter period, ceased to live to ourselves; and is it the master idea of our being—as it should be—how we may most worthily and effectually show forth the praises of God and of his Christ? Do heaven and earth, in other language, see us—God’s servants in God’s husbandry—sowing, by thought, word, and act, the heaven-born seed of eternal life; or do they witness the dreary spectacle of the children of the kingdom sowing the enemy’s seed—seed, which only brings forth fruit in incorruptible corruption?

Do we say—by God’s grace, we have learned to sow to

the Spirit? Then "let us not be weary in well-doing." As there are delusions, which make mock of God, so there are other delusions, which assume that it is possible for God to make mock of us. Under stress of temptation we may doubt the reality of the harvest of life; or we may fear with a blameworthy fear, whether some mischance may not deprive us of it; or we may become impatient of the labour, which is needed to secure its precious fruits; or again, it may seem to us, as though the reaping time was unreasonably distant. Let no such evil imagining have place in us. God is not deceived; and He cannot deceive. There is no surer or more glorious reality than eternal life. It is the inheritance of the righteous, prepared for them from the world's foundation. The toil, by which it must be won, is Divinely prescribed and measured. "In due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Therefore let the sowers to the Spirit abound always in the work of the Lord, and let them never cease to rejoice in the blissful assurance, that their "labour is not in vain in the Lord."

But if the case be otherwise, and we belong to the evil company of the sowers to the flesh, let the words of the apostle so sink down into our ears, that they shall lead us to "amend our doings," and to "turn" with eager haste "unto the Lord," with whom we are at war. So, by his boundless mercy, we shall live and not die; the poisoned seed, which we have sown, shall perish in the clods, and yield no fruit; and, in the end of the days, we also shall go, with the sowers to the Spirit, into the kingdom of heaven, carrying our sheaves with us.

THE SAINTS' EVERLASTING REST.

“THERE remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God.”—HEB. iv. 9.

THIS is not simply a Divine declaration. It is the conclusion of a Divine argument—an argument, the material of which is taken from Old Testament Scripture. The Holy Ghost not unfrequently speaks after this manner by the writers of the New Testament. They draw out and exhibit the hidden meaning of the older revelation. Its mysteries are unwrapped. Its shadows and symbols give place to the realities, for which they stood. Bright blossoms of truth break forth from all but invisible seeds. Dawn passes into noonday. The rudiments of the world become a well ordered and marvellous creation. There is unveiling, expansion, development. What seemed but now a ceremony, is shown to have been a designed prefiguration. Where Moses delivers a literal precept—a law for the eye or foot—evangelists and apostles read that exceeding broad and spiritual commandment, which binds the thoughts and the heart. And many a promise of the Old Testament, referring apparently to temporal blessing alone, swells out in the New into good, which, even now, “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.”

And let us not be unmindful of this, in our use of the Old Testament. It is possible to import into it a meaning, which it was never intended to carry. It is still easier to fall short of its true and full significance. It may teach

us, it ought to teach us, much more than it taught, or was intended to teach, those who lived before the times of the Gospel. Read the New Testament in the light of the Old. Read the Old in the light of the New. They illuminate each other, and are together the One Word of Him who liveth for ever and ever.

In the text, the apostle "opens" from the Old Testament, and so "alleges" a blessed New Testament doctrine. "There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God." We have to do with :

I.

The Argument, from which the apostle draws his Conclusion.

1. The general aim, it will be remembered, of the wonderful book, to which the text belongs, is to show how the glory of the Christian economy eclipses and swallows up that of the dispensation which preceded it, and to fix the attention of the Church upon the heightened privilege and obligation, which this superiority involves. These two objects—the doctrinal and the practical—are kept in view throughout the Epistle, and they twine about one another like gold and silver threads, and appear in company in every part of it. The Gospel is greater than the Law, unspeakably greater. Its Author is more glorious. Its discoveries of truth are larger and more spiritual. Its salvation is abundantly richer. Its sanctions are more solemn and gladdening. Let our faith, therefore, our joy in God, our obedience, be marked by a corresponding elevation, pureness, and constancy. It ought to be so. It must be so. God will not permit to be otherwise. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" On the other hand, thrice happy are they, to whom God speaks

not by prophets or angels, but by his Son, made of the seed of Abraham, and “not ashamed to call us brethren!”

2. At the point at which the text places us, the apostle will be seen to draw a parallel between the illustrious law-giver and head of the Old Economy, and the still more illustrious lawgiver and Head of the New, and from this to gather matter of admonition and encouragement for the servants of Christ. Moses was God’s apostle to Israel. He was counted worthy to be put in charge of the household of God. He taught them the will of God. He guided and governed them, as God’s minister and representative. To receive what Moses taught, and to do what Moses bade, was the whole duty of the Church. To refuse to hearken was to fight against God, and to run the risk of losing the adoption. Many did so : some, like Miriam and Aaron on a memorable occasion, to their great loss ; others, not a few, to their utter undoing—“whose carcasses fell in the wilderness.” The obedient were saved, and in due season crossed over the Jordan, and possessed the land of their inheritance.

How much loftier a position do we occupy ! Our obligations—how solemn, as compared with theirs ! Our calling and prospects—how vastly they excel what Israel looked for, or enjoyed ! Consider the Apostle of the Christian profession. No longer a servant, an equal set over equals, stands at the head of God’s household. The very Son of the Lord of the household—He is the head of it. Christ, the builder of all things, Himself therefore Divine, is the Apostle of God to the Church now. What authority He possesses ! How ought He to be listened to ! Let us take heed. The Son, not Moses, has rule over us. Hear Him ; hear Him. Blessed are they that do his commandments. The water, the manna, the cloud, the glory in the

tabernacle—poor emblems at best of what God has prepared, in these last days, for them that love Him. Above all, there is provided for us, as the issue and goal of our course, a good as far excelling that which Israel hoped for, as Israel's lord was inferior to the Author and Captain of our salvation.

3. The apostle, however, is not content with simply affirming this last position. He argues it from the teaching of the Old Testament. The doctrine, he shows, is involved in that teaching, and follows of necessity from it. What was the highest promise made to the Church in the wilderness? It was that, their journeyings being ended, they should come to God's rest. And, as we have seen, they did come to it. Moses led them to the borders, and Joshua put them into actual possession. But this, the apostle contends, was not the whole, nor even the principal part of that, which God intended, and which we should understand by his promise to them. Canaan was not, properly speaking, the rest of God. God's rest is something very different from the "land flowing with milk and honey." We have positive proof of this—the apostle reasons. For in the ninety-fifth Psalm, written hundreds of years after Joshua, and those who entered Palestine with him, were dead, we hear God, by the mouth of David, warning the men of that late generation, that they should not, like their disobedient forefathers, come short of his rest. So then, it is clear, the rest, of which God spoke to Moses, and to the men of Moses' time, was not simply Canaan; it was something which, centuries after the promise of Canaan had been fulfilled, remained still a promise to the Church, as yet unfulfilled. What is God's rest? Can we doubt what it is, when one in a certain place has said, "And God did rest the seventh day from

all his works." This is God's rest—the blessed, holy, perfect, unbroken, everlasting sabbath, on which He entered when the works of the days were ended; the heavenly quiet and felicity, of which the seventh day was ordained from the beginning to be a copy and earnest to mankind through all ages. Canaan, therefore, so far from exhausting the promise of rest, which God gave to Israel, was but the symbol and hint of a much higher good, even that which God had prepared, from the foundation of the world, as the ultimate recompense of his servants. For us, in these last days, whatever preparatory and secondary fulfilments of the promise of rest God may have granted to his people, there remains the outstanding, residuary, unaccomplished, yet most sure promise of inheritance in the eternal and all glorious rest of God.

Such is the argument from which the apostle draws his conclusion. Consider :

II.

The Conclusion, which he draws from his Argument.

1. The Church is, by and by, to rest with God. God keeps perpetual sabbath in his Divine dwelling place: his people are to keep it with Him. The final estate of Christians will be participation with God in his ineffable rest.

Three great views of the heavenly life are suggested by this unique language of the apostle. It points strongly to the blessedness, the sanctity, and the permanence of the future condition of God's spiritual household.

Speaking as men speak, God laboured, when He created the heavens and the earth. And it is not an accident, but a Divine arrangement and ordination that, while in this world, his servants also shall labour. The Head of the household did so, when here incarnate. Flesh and blood

like ourselves, placed as we are in a sphere of imperfection and trial, He did the will of God in submission, patience, suffering, unwearied service. And it is the law of the Church—if any man will be his disciple, he must needs tread in the steps of his Master's labour. The sea and the wilderness must be faced. On where Christ leads, even if it be through solitudes, and burning sands, and valleys of shadow of death! We are "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." This is our style and title. This is our character also, if we are truly God's. Need we argue, that Christ's true disciples are labourers? Minding the house, tilling the soil, travelling in deserts, wrestling with opponents, running for prizes, fighting in battle—these are the figures, by which Scripture denotes and illustrates the Christian life; and those who live this life most faithfully know best, how true they are to fact. To surrender the world; to make a modest, yet bold and consistent, profession of religion; to cultivate a spiritual temper; to struggle with evil, internal and outward; to suffer by the will of God, and not be sullen or angry; to care for the wellbeing of others with the charity of Christ—what labour of body and soul, of feeling and faith, does not this imply! But rest is at hand. Yonder with God in his glorious habitation, where flesh and blood are only known as they are transmuted into the likeness of the heavenly; where disappointment and pain are no longer the necessary conditions of religious security; where mysteries of Providence never shadow the confidence and peace of the inhabitants; where every service is welcome, and every obligation links itself to joy; where "the oil of gladness" is the substitute for "mourning," and "the garments of praise" replace "the spirit of heaviness"—blessed are Christ's dead, for they rest from their labour.

It is moral evil, especially, which creates and accounts for the labour of the Church. Our inborn disposition to sin; the wickedness of our fellow men; the usurpation and active hostility of the Evil One—these are, in great part, the secret of our present toil and suffering. Were the moral evil that is in and about us only abolished, what a drying up of tears there would be, what a lightening of the burdens of life, what a new face would the unquiet, troubled earth take! This is what every spiritual man longs for—a restitution and new birth of the world. And it is to be. The rest, which God has provided for his Church, is a sabbath keeping. Heaven is a state of quietness, repose, tranquillity, bliss; mainly because it is a state of all pervading, all dominant sanctity. God blessed the seventh day. It was to bring rest to man's weary frame, or weary mind. He sanctified it, that the rest might be real and satisfying—the intellect resting in the truth of God, the heart resting in his love; sanctified it, that it might be spent in holy thoughts and exercises, and so might become at once a miniature of his own sacred rest, and a blessed preparation for it. Without the hallowing, the earthly sabbath would not have been a rest. No sanctification, no sabbath! This is the law for all time. God rests in heaven in his infinite holiness. We shall finally rest within the consecrated home of this divine perfection. Where God is, righteousness dwells. "There shall in no-wise enter into" his celestial city "anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." It is the dwellingplace of God; and his people see Him. It is the temple of God; and they serve Him day and night in it. However dreadful, however prolonged the conflict with evil may now be; whatever it may cost us to turn to

God, to pray, to breast the stream, to carry the cross of our Lord, to be instant in well doing ; we shall sooner or later find ourselves, where every element and influence is holy, and where no accursed thing can by possibility intrude.

Once more, the apostle's words suggest the idea of permanence. Who does not know, that things earthly are shifting and mutable ? We leave them behind, or they change in our presence, or they take to themselves wings and depart. Is it not so even with those religious privileges, which Christians value more than all temporal good ? We cannot keep the closet door always shut. We may not spend perpetual sabbath. It is a rare case, when the sunshine of the soul is never clouded. Nay more, our very graces themselves, the love of God in the heart and all its divine fruits, may wither and perish. God's rest is liable to none of these decays and fluctuations. All down the course of the ages, God has rested in blessedness and sanctity. His glorious quiet has been violated by no disturbance. "The heathen have raged, and the kingdoms have been moved." He has rested still. And so He will continue to rest ; for, though He laboured once, He will not labour again. His rest is everlasting. And "quietness and assurance for ever," is the heritage of his chosen. Rest ; sabbath rest ; God's rest—therefore endless. Bloom, as of manhood in its freshness, but no decrepitude ; friends gathering thickly, their fellowship immortal ; tears wiped from the eyes, not to fall again ; the light, which is better than life, breaking on the soul, and abiding always ; songs, such as angels sing, pouring forth from human lips ; the calm yet thrilling consciousness, that all that man can win, or hope for, is gained for ever ; the Lamb seen in his beauty, and the land our own which was once afar off—this is

the rest—though, alas, how poor a picture of it!—God's "rest," which "remaineth for the people of God."

2. But while the apostle thus holds up to our view the prospect of future rest, he marks with much emphasis, partly in the text, partly in the context, the conditions under which the rest is promised, and the qualifications necessary for the enjoyment of it. Let us not fail to note these important points.

There is a tendency in our times, to give undue comprehensiveness to the grace of the gospel, to make it—paradox as it may seem—more gracious than it really is, and to bring within range of its promises many whom the Scriptures distinctly exclude from them. Now though nothing is more hateful in itself, or more repugnant to the spirit of Christianity, than religious narrowness and exclusiveness, though we are never nearer spiritual ruin ourselves, than when we are haughtily or flippantly consigning others to it, we neither honour God, nor promote the cause of truth, by running to one extreme, in order to avoid another. Here therefore let us beware, both for our own sake and for that of others. God's rest is not open to all comers. Mankind indiscriminately are not entitled to it, and will not be admitted to its blessedness. Nothing can be more explicit than the language of the apostle on this subject. Always setting aside the case of the unevangelized of our race—the rest remaineth, not for the world in mass, but for the people of God. The people of God are to rest for ever—none else. And who are intended by this appellation, we need not travel far beyond the text to discover. They are partakers of the calling of God by the Gospel. They have heard the words of One greater than angels, and have ceased to provoke God by sinning. They have entered into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and have confidence

towards God in Him. They rejoice in hope of the glory of God. They are holy brethren, and, in the bonds of a living fellowship with Christ, they labour to keep his commandments, and to further the manifold purposes of his redeeming grace. Such are they who have the promise of rest, as the apostle pourtrays them. They are converted, believing, regenerate, godly men—men who have come out from the evil, and are separate, and touch no unclean thing, and to whom God has become a Father through the Apostle and Highpriest of the Christian profession.

Then—the second great point to be noted—the rest of God will be actually attained and possessed by those who, having passed through these experiences, and having reached this divine estate of Christian honour and grace, are faithful unto death. The connection of the text lays the utmost stress upon this. God did not rest from his creative works till they were fully accomplished. The great Captain of human salvation—how was He straitened, so long as the task which the Father appointed Him remained unfinished. Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum—all were as nothing, till they had been supplemented by the garden, the cross, the sepulchre. And we become partakers of Christ properly, fully, and finally, partakers of Him in the only sense in which it will be any ultimate advantage to us to be so, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence and profession firm unto the end. It is not enough, that we be brought into gracious and holy fellowship with God. The fellowship must be perpetuated in all Christian vigilance, prayerfulness, and holy living. It will not suffice, that we assume the Christian name, and, with Egypt and the sea behind us, set forward in the way of submission and service which God has prescribed for us. The profession must be kept and maintained. There must

be no weariness in welldoing. Through shame, and pain, and temptation, if needs be, faith and patience are to endure, as seeing Him that is invisible. The servant going into God's rest, must have finished the works which God gave him to do, even as God first finished his works, and then entered into his rest. This is the perfect qualification for heaven—our work all done ; not well begun merely, or prosecuted for a season, but, what is vastly rarer and more difficult, perseveringly pursued and duly ended. The welcome to God's everlasting rest is one ; it does not vary—"Well done, good and faithful servant."

What are the Issues, to which this whole doctrine leads ?

1. Let us see to it, that we do not indulge false hopes of eternal salvation. God's rest is for God's people. What have others to do with it ? Wicked persons, worshippers of the world, loungers at the church door—their hope is a dream. Let not ours be such. Prove your own selves. Know you not that rest is for the weary—God's rest for God's labourers ? "We which have believed do enter into rest."

2. Cherish a serious concern, lest, the promise of rest being given you, you should be seen by and by to have come short of it. There are views of God, and of sin, and of Christ, and of the future world, obtaining around us, which do not sort well with any such monition as this. You must make your choice. An alternative is before you. The popular theology teaches, that God is a being of boundless good nature, and that no man need be afraid of Him. The Bible, with an emphatic and unwavering testimony, declares Him to be, for evildoers, a terrible God, and One whom even the congregation of his saints must hold in reverence. If you accept the revelation, you

will utterly disbelieve and repudiate the sentimentality which denies it; and, whatever your stability or ripeness as a Christian, you will fear, lest the ground should fail beneath you, and lest, your graces fading and perishing, you should incur the anger of God, and become eventually a castaway. Did not God make promise of his rest to all those who went out of Egypt? Yet who of them attained it? Their failure is recorded for our learning, that we may not fall, after the same example of unbelief.

3. Adopt suitable means for promoting and giving effect to this sacred fear of departing from God. The all seeing, all avenging holiness of God—let that be kept steadfastly in view. God's word to the Church is not a letter. It is a life. It is "quick and powerful." It carries a sword. It has eyes of flame. Let us beware. There may be sin in the spirit, which does not appear in action. Those eyes will see it. That sharp, two-edged sword will deal with it. We may be ready to say; if this be so, who then can be saved—for who can stand before such a God? We cannot, unless there be a mediator. There is a mediator. Christ is the Moses of the Gospel dispensation. He is the Aaron also. And if, on the one hand, there are the eyes of fire, and the terrible sword, on the other we may see the mercyseat, and the sprinkling of the blood of atonement, and One ever living to make intercession for us. Let this glorious cluster of objects be always before you. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." "Come boldly to the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Moreover, make much of the privileges of the Christian brotherhood. Our salvation is too great a work for our individual hand. It must be wrought out by the common prayer and effort of the household of faith. Let iron sharpen iron. "For-

sake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is ; but exhort one another daily : ” and so make ready to enter into the rest.

4. Finally, thank God without ceasing for his exceeding great and precious promise, and encourage yourselves in his service by joyfully anticipating the future recompense. Blessed be God, whose love to sinners calls them to this lofty inheritance—let this be the tone of your life—who has already made a numberless number of mankind, partakers of the grace of it ; and whose infinite mercy enables us also to look forward to the same unspeakable fruition, as the terminus and crown of our Christian service ! We labour now. Ere long we shall rest. For the present it is weary weekday : but the sabbath draws on. Yet “ a little while ”—so Christ Himself speaks—and “ He that shall come will come, and will not tarry ; ” and a greater than Joshua shall lead the consecrated host into the “ rest which remaineth for the people of God.”

